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ARCHIVE



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It was our pleasure, a few days since, to be present at a gathering of the voters, of this township, of the Prohibition party. We were highly entertained by the speeches of the occasion and were glad that we had the privilege of hearing the doctrine of the party so thoroughly discussed. It is not our purpose here to attempt a refutation of the arguments there promulgated, but there is one clause in their platform that we do desire to notice: "The right of suffrage rests upon no mere accident of race, color, sex or nationality." Can our men who have the privilege of exercising the great American right of suffrage declare by their ballot that they are willing for our women to be pulled down from their high social position and at every election to be contaminated by and to become associates with the debauchees of all *nations*, of all *races*, of all *colors*? Are they willing for them to lose the holy influence which now surrounds the very name of woman? Are they willing that she should lose the influence which she now so surely exercises over the ballot of this nation by herself becoming biased by the corruption of politics and being unable then to exercise an influence which she ought to have? Yet these are the inevitable results of woman's suffrage. For just so long as politicians have the nature which so many of them now have and which they will continue to have until the dawn of the millenium, politics will reek with the rottenness incident to political strife. Woman by her ballot will become a supporter of this corruption as well as of the good contained in her party's platform. This being seen by the public, the evil result will follow. God grant that upon us at least may never dawn the day in which the right of suffrage, which is now a curse to so many, may be the means of lowering our high social standing and of lessening the influence of the most effective element in the cause of the church on earth.

Trinity Archive
November, 1888

What are the concomitants of Republican supremacy in North Carolina? They are simply these: A Republican Supreme Court and legislature, which means, unless they renounce their former career, the payment of \$30,000,000 worth of bonds issued during the carpet-bag rule in North Carolina and bought by Morton, Bliss & Co. after they had been repudiated by an honest legislature; negro supremacy in the eastern counties; negro judges who, in their turn, will preside over the courts in the western as well as eastern counties, and a step toward social equality between the races. White men of North Carolina, can you afford to stand idly by and see your commonwealth impoverished by the unjust demands of a modern Shylock? to see the white race, your own race, made politically subordinate to the negro race, and socially put on an equality with it? to see your civil institutions, which were planted and have been fostered by the white race, the sole divinely endowed champion of the Christian civilization, torn down by political demagogues and negroes for the purpose of self aggrandizement? You certainly cannot. This is a menace to society which it is your sacred duty to ward against. Disregarding party standings, keeping in view the good of home, vote so as to preserve the honor and integrity of your state.

Trinity Archive
November, 1888

Well, The Archive has made some mistakes. And in the interest of being neither entirely responsible nor historyless we'd like to retract some previous editorial opinions. In particular we are dissatisfied with this couple of editorials that appeared in 1888. At that time The Archive was a monthly journal published by the literary societies of Trinity College under the supervision of a faculty censor. Since then Trinity College became Duke University, added some black faculty and a few more women students, and we got rid of the censor. But the Duke community is still grappling with the issues of how we want to treat women and whether we want to vote for and hire blacks or not. How we act on these issues will become clearer in time and however this Archive speaks for this generation of students, we hope it will speak well.

The Archive
November, 1988

Tara Shoemaker

A Word On the Fifth Element

the Dictionary said:

Quintessence: anything in its purest form.

I say

it is the shuddering grip
of a shower gone suddenly cold.

It is to stand on the waterline
and feel the tide pull the sand
from beneath your daydreams.

It is the back door of your iris
ajar on old hinges,
so I want to walk inside.

Therefore I cast my spell
on those who say that
butterflies can be caught
one handed. Or that a poem can be tackled
and thrown laughing to the grass
like a lover.

I say that poems sleep
quintessential in the bellies of cellos
waiting.

Tara Shoemaker

Although We All Cheat At Night

Deep sea under
water silence muffles
aluminum tink of swim ladder,

we shine slick,
indigo skinned. Laugh
purple lipped. Watch
blurred legs like
exotic fish.

Surfacing we feel
bubbles
brush past
as gentle soda kisses,

the back porch light
like a fog chill,
yet, can't separate
night from water.

. . .marco?

. . .po
lo!

Darryl Houston

Kay Peed

“I wouldn’t BE so psychocritical”
barked clear asthey
quack quack
and tipped her canoe

bespectacled
pickle my grimace
what can YOU fix ME
smack thee thick yogurt stick
alco
holic

unyield this tribal insistence
beat fool
as scarlet liqueur
drips, painting drum expanded
ann
expanded
and contracted
forewarned
Har De Har Har

du Ausch du Ausch du Ausch
this witch burning legal tender.

Family Visit, Melbourne

We have come back to this old house
that perches by the railroad tracks,
sheds its grey paint like a skin.
The frozen lace of the white iron fence
asks me to draw up my spine,
smile like an inheritor
on the proud little yard,
the single jacaranda tree
dropping its long, fat pods on the grass.
In the front room is the red and black patterned carpet,
the dark orange wingback chairs.
Morning is seeping in through the back windows.
My mother and aunt talk cautiously over tea,
their faces cupped by the light
moving across the ceiling.

My aunt and niece go to school during the day.
I wander through the house,
take baths in the huge tub
my brother and I played in as babies.
At night I think about friends at home,
morning routines.

I walk with my grandmother in the yard.
She says *That was the monster bush.*
It has been pruned back.
You'd call 'Here I go, into the woods!'

I walk up to High Street later for fish and chips.
Buying beer, I pluck four bright-blue, misted bottles
from the first cooler.
The man at the counter says
Know your way around, yeah?
The breeze ticks in the shop.
I remember his soft, plain face,
his hand with the change suspended over mine.

When the nine o'clock train
throws itself past,
a streaming line of lights
flung up in the dark,
I'm gathering the greasy white papers,
wishing myself on the furthest car ahead,
splitting the night's skin open
as I go.

Senga Carroll

Poem

A bruise of clouds over the moon,
the sea beaten silver,
and you still fill my eyes like hot light.
Back in the cottage there is
the edge of your shoulder
rubbing for sparks
against the still air of our room;
there is the warm plain of your back
where my hands love to harvest;
there are the strung beads
of your spine.

In this close room
we are imagining
something new.

There are no references.
We're spinning possibilities,
pulling the thread
out of ourselves,
drawing it tight
to go on standing.

Let's go out
under the night sky,
hold each other in the waves
until they've pushed us up
onto the hard sand
and I can see your eyes
in the light off the pier,
shining dark as wells.
Dreaming in the water,
you might sing snatches of songs to me.
Drifting in that black,
I might decide
never to let go.

Senga Carroll

Summer Wishes

Three steps off the porch
into the layered, whispering woods.
Birds are shots of colored light
at the edge of your vision,
their thin, spangled calls
patterned as a currant stem
you slide your fingers along
collecting the sweet, dark red knots.
The dazzled sound
follows you from place to place
under the canopy.

You want to read the forest floor,
another medium, another language,
the verses waiting in the flattened redbud leaves,
the tips of the dogwood branches,
flaming pink and white blossoms
turned up, offering.
What wonderful naming is here:
chokeberry, columbine, blue-eyed grass.
You understand — they want to be said,
rolling them in your mouth,
testing their edges and hollows.
I am not fluent.
I miss whole phrases,
have to reach for the easiest terms.
I may never learn them,
may simply watch
from this shaded chair,
wish you sleep deep as a cave,
time simple as water.

Sit On My Fist And Lean Back On My Thumb

Each of us has a chair. There's me and Ardeburn and Strange all sitting here in these armchairs, that we got at the yardsale, as if we were kings. It's not very comfortable, but it looks good and it sure as hell beats moving. Hell, we hate to move so much we haven't even gotten up to turn the air condition on. So here we sit. Sweating like young pigs and wishin' we had some way to do. The trouble with doing anything is that it's so tiring, and the trouble with sitting here is that it's so frustrating. It's not right. It's not our natural way to be but...well, it's just like Arde says: it doesn't matter if we do anything or not because changing the world is like trying to push rain back up into the clouds. If you can't change it, leave alone, that's what I say. We used to have this real nice stereo and a refrigerator but the Mastercard man came and took them along with Strange's card. Now all we got is these chairs and a bag of butter beans that we cooked on a Coleman stove we found. And the air conditioner, which we can't afford to turn on, even if we had the gumption. Anyway this is how it's gonna' be until one of us, me or one of my tombstone buddies Strange or Arde that is, thinks of a way to get free. The footrest is still working in my chair but the back won't recline any more. Being free is hard to imagine in this position. Arde's got the paper. He can read. Me and Strange can read, but not as well. Arde's got this way of knowing just what is going on underneath the print. I guess what I'm trying to say is that each of us can read, but Arde can see truth. There's no jealousy. Arde can see truth but he's not too good at spotin' yard sale signs or Coleman stoves or the bag of beans that is keeping us going.

Strange and I are playing our favorite game, sit on my fist and lean back on my thumb. Me and him take turns stickin' our paws out, thumbs up, and the other waits in his arm chair 'til the time is right before making for the other's thumb. If you can get a hold on the thumb and pull it back till it sounds painful or the other guy cheats and hits you then you have sat on his fist and leaned back on his thumb and you stop pulling and stick out your paw. I'm not sure how it started. It's just one of those things with a life of its own. Games get started and people play them no matter if it's their best buddy or even their tombstone buddy that they're hurtin'. Strange hurt my thumb on his last pull so we quit for a while. He's layin' back with his dust coated head cocked

sideways, staring at the space where the TV used to be. It's kind of a worn out spot in the floor boards 'cause we used to scuffle there over which channel we would watch. My favorite show was Hogan's Heroes. I was always willing to scrap for that one. I can just sit here all day thinkin' about those boys tunnelling their way out of prison and being able to escape anytime they wanted but choosing to stay in. Imagine that. With all of us sitting here with our best thinking caps on trying to figure out how to get free and those boys chose to stay in. Hmm. We want out. Arde says that from what he can tell we're the low man on the pole and right now the whole lot above us is trying to lean back on our thumbs. Arde says we can get a drive away with the money we sold our blood for along with what's left from the last job and go to Canada. I wonder if we can fit our new chairs into a drive away. Strange asks Arde if there's McDonald's in Canada. He's afraid of McDonald's because he's afraid of having to work there. Arde thinks we can avoid the McDonald's in Canada. Maybe we can grow our own butter beans there.

Tomorrow we're going to use our next door neighbor's phone to call around for a drive away to Saskatchewan. That's way up north, says Arde, where people have dignity. Our neighbor lets us use the phone, even though he doesn't use it himself. He thinks the FBI is tapping his phone in order to help Satan keep him separated from his family. I don't think I understand the full story, but we need to use his phone bad.

Back when we had a stereo I used to have this old seventy-eight record that I tried to play on our record player. It always sounded too slow whether I played it at 33&1/3 or 45, but I could understand the songs well enough. One was called Do Re Mi. It was about people who went to California from Oklahoma and Texas when those states were just dust bowls. "If you ain't got the do-re-mi, you better go back to beautiful Texas." I hope they don't sing that song in Saskatchewan. It didn't used to be so bad here; back before I saw that it was a waste of my time working for someone else's profit. I quit my tie job three months ago and started painting and roofing. That's when I met Arde and Strange. They were roofing the same house that I was painting. We worked together on two roofing jobs. The last one ended a week ago. Summer's running out. The more it fades the more we realize that we can't go back to our old jobs after being our own bosses. I mean all summer we done what we wanted. We worked hard and rested and went frog giggin' when we wanted to. Strange is asleep now. He's been feeling low since he lost the card. He thought that was freedom. Arde says cards are the worst kind of trap.

I used to be in love, and I used to think that that was what it was all about. That was long before I embraced my tie job or my new life with Strange and Arde. I thought I had found truth. It's what Arde calls losing perspective. It's like when you go to one of those films that is so cool you wish you could be in it but you can't, so you try to go to sleep that night thinking about it so that your dream will be like the movie and you'll be in it. I fell in love and started thinking like that. It was like I was making my own movie, directing my own dream. The only problem was that it was all in my head. I didn't realize that she was making her own movie in her head and that she and her father were writing the script, which left me out after the first couple scenes. Strange used to work for a movie man from out west. He painted the set walls. He says movies aren't real, like they look. He says they can't film a movie right because of the camera. It becomes obvious unless it's the perspective of someone in the movie. But if it's their perspective, you can't see them. The camera lets the audience feel like they're inside somebody's head, says Strange. Arde says it's impossible to get in someone else's head. So this girl dumped me and went home to her dad. The thing is that even now I can't rewrite the movie to make it real. I still feel like it would work out and my life set if we could get away, if she could get free of her dad. That just shows you how right Arde is, I mean her dad's probably dead and she's married to some guy named Lance who owns a bank. But that's not the way I see it, sitting here in this chair; that's not my movie.

Fuckers! I'm gonna dust these two, just like I should have a long time ago. Arde and Fieg are draggin' me down. It's like my old man always said I could really go far if it wasn't for the no accounts I hang out with. I should have known that first week when the cat died that these two were no good for someone like me. Look at 'em, sittin there like they didn't have a care in the world. You'd think they like livin' in this shit; hand to mouth it is, using the psycho's phone. Hell, they ain't never had a damn thing except what I bought on the card. You'd think they would have appreciated it, but all Arde does is second guess me, preachin' about how the banks is evil, and Fieg is his "yes" man. You can't expect much out of a guy who quit a salaried job to live like this. If I had that job, I'd dust these two, like I said before. As things are now, I'll probably end up following Arde's scheme. If it doesn't work, I'll only have myself to blame. I should have split the first week.

after the cat bit it. The poor little fucker. That was the best cat a man could have had, and I don't even like cats. He was like Doc Holiday of the cat world. Sickly, but tough. I called him Stinker 'cause I found him out by the old sewage treatment plant. It seemed like every day when I got back from wherever I had been, he had caught a bird or two and put it out on the front stoop for me to see. He was always sneezing and rail thin, which is why he reminded me of Doc Holiday. A man's cat he was, always killin' things, up til the day he bit it.

He was up under the tub. Those two left the door to the plumbing open and Stinker had climbed through there and gotten up under the tub. You could see he was in bad shape from the blood on the pipes that he had slid between, but that wasn't anything compared to the noise he was making. It was this real human cry. He was screaming in that way that makes you want to put your hands over your ears, and those two were just sittin' in here crying and moaning about how bad it all was that Stinker was dying. But did they do a damn thing to save him? 'Course not. It was me that had to crawl into that plumbing and beg that bugger to come out, so I could help him. When he finally come out his hairs were all covered with blood and snot and his jaw was all twisted. So I wrapped him up in some paper towels and took him up to the vet. Arde and Fieg just sat there with their wet faces and didn't offer to help one bit. That's how they are. The vet said she could save him for eighty-five dollars. I put it on the card. That was back when I still had it. The next day I come back to get Stinker and she says he died from shock, and she says she'll bury him for five dollars. I told her to go fuck herself, that a man can bury his own cat that he loved and that would have lived if they hadn't shocked it to death. If I were rich I'd change some things around here. Me and mine would get some respect. Arde's always saying you can't just change things by trying to get rich like the bankers, but if I know anything I know you can't fight the powers, unless you got some yourself. I'd know how to do something with it too. If these two ever got any money or power they'd probably whine about how awful it was, but if I had it I'd kick some ass with it. Them that are livin' high now would fear me. Every day I could get me a couple of them big boys, kind of like Stinker used to do with them birds.

That's bullshit, the same stuff that Arde's always preachin'. Bullshit. People like us go nowhere but backwards or sideways but never forward. The big lie is that you're going somewhere. T.V. people are always saying how bad things used to be. Sure things are bad for you they say, but they're getting better and if you work hard you'll live better. We ain't goin' nowhere. I think somewhere people are going

someplace nicer than the one they're at now, but where they're at now is someplace I'll never make it to, more than I'll ever get. I'm not meaning to whine out of the side of my mouth. I just want to do something.

People are funny that way. That man is so scared he won't pick up his own phone, but he lets strangers like us come into his apartment to use it. People let each other in and shut each other out without a thought. I'm hoping a new place will help these two see things a little clearer. Most of the time you can't even imagine what you know until you go someplace else and look back. Once you know it no one can make you unknow it, because it's part of you.

Maybe I'm wrong; maybe we have all these possibilities just like people on the T.V. used to say. It just seems like there's nowhere to go these days. Fieg thinks I know a lot, but I only know one thing: we got to get out of this mess before we get evicted. Once we get a car we'll have hold of one the most free things in America. Riding in a car on the open road makes you feel like you're almost free. Passing all those prisons along the way is depressing though. Small town. That's what it's called when every one watches you and smells you and decides whether you're normal, meaning like them. It's kind of sad that the small town is probably the last place left where someone might feel big enough to try to get free but people are so worried about what the reaction might be, so afraid that they might be wrong in front of the snoopers and sniffers, that they stay in, like Hogan's Heroes. Unless there is some great shock to their system, people believe that they are getting what they deserve. Fieg and Strange say that I won't quit preachin' to them. I'm just trying to get my plan straight. As long as I keep my ideas in my head I never know whether they're sensible or not. Once I say them out, I know. Life should be something you make up as you go along. That's freedom. Being here and talking to these two has got me some freedom, but it's just a sort of imaginary freedom in my head and until I get out for real that's all I'll ever have.

I found the car in the trader, and I went over to Kenwood to check it out yesterday morning. It had these triangular windows that pop out in the front; they're not very useful, but all old cars used to have them, and I remember trying to spit out of them when I was little. It was one

of those old Cadillacs. Big. We were lookin' for a convertible, because Strange likes to feel the wind in his face. We all like the wind, but Strange brought it up when we were thinkin' about it, so we kind of give credit to him. "It's not what we were lookin' for. On account of the top." I said, staring at the car. It had beautiful little wings in the back and a dashboard as big as a table. The woman selling it was wearing red cat eye glasses and an orange smock with lots of flowers. "The top's fine." She said. Rust covered the the bottom below the doors, but the engine sounded good. I got a feelin' when I was lookin' at the car, that this was a machine that would take us out of here and let us stretch at the same time. It was that strange kind of feeling when all your hairs feel like they're standing on end, but they're not. I felt like one of those people demonstrating static electricity, but when I reached up and felt my hair it was greasy and limp. The seats were covered with moldy covers but the cushions were nice and firm below. I just wanted to curl up and sleep on the front seat. So I came back to the homestead and told Strange and Arde. Two hundred was a mighty high price, but it was less than the deposit on the drive-a-ways. Except Strange wanting the wind in his face, it sounded pretty good to them.

Leaving is starting to look both good and bad to me. Everything seems to be like that. Sometimes when I'm deciding things, I feel like one option is more bad than another, but I'm always distrustful when that happens. This car can take us out. Whether out is any better than in, I don't know, the only way we can find out is to try leaving. If Arde and I take care of the window pane in the bathroom we might get some of the deposit back on the apartment, and that would leave us some more gas money. I asked Arde about the chairs. He says we're going to use those in the trade for the car. They'll be hard to give up. It's just trading one thing for another, a simple exchange, but we just got them last week and they are worth a lot more to us than we can ever get for them. I guess it's not that big of a deal. Only I keep thinking that whenever we get to where we're going, we're going to need those chairs to sit in.

Kathleen Wilson

Onion Addiction

If I'm not mistaken,
you are something I usually eat.
Why do I have to look at you?
Lacking any substance under those layers of pale skin,
I peel away, burning in your stringent stink.
Full of acid
and, upon purchase, covered with dirt.
To eat you is to be reminded
of all that goes in this mouth
and, even worse, what comes out.
Yes, you're ugly.
Words can't describe how ugly.
Still I swallow, knowing
there will be no easy slide down my throat
but instead the always imminent possibility
of a slow death by choking.
Why don't you come clean?
Everyone knows you're only used to taste.
You'll never go farther
than a mere spice.
I can put you in massive recipes of meatloaf
or drown you in chicken soup.
Still you come through.
Soon, I will give up and use your cheap seasoning
to sour even the sweetest things.

Kathleen Wilson

See Through

You ask me what it is like?
I'll tell you only that this ugly image
is all that we will ever know.
It has been drawn on chalkboard and taught from day one:
This is the way it is.
We are the people fed full,
still eating the cellophane world
that has been wrapped for our convenience.

Consider Thompkins Square Park
massive in its numbers
of crack vials, heroin syringes, and bag ladies.
Is it automatic to say, hey,
that's where it's all at
and try to capture
the perfect photograph
of some bum on a bench?

Just because this cellophane covered world
Is revealed for any eye and ready for any purpose
in the crinkle of the sticky material
does not mean we can simply
pull it apart and hear the static
of all the people, hundreds in a long line,
Shuffling away, disappearing,
A day's dignity distributed
in a brown paper bag.

Dan Patterson

village galleries

when we bleed
delicately,
together,
watching a drop of water
hang above a circle of dust,
your hands are not mine;
your body can not be mine;
but from our veins flows the life
that will kill us both.

when we break
craftily,
apart,
only when time can dance and shake
through measured space,
you can yawn about my silence;
I can weather your roar;
but the ocean that salts the sand
will break and bleach our bones.

when we melt
 fragile,
 alone,
aging graceless
with our cracked porcelain eyes
 you will tighten your ventilator smile;
 I will strip bare my coloring shadows;
 but graven like plaster
 our bitten-off shock feathers our bed.

when we fall
 finally,
 beautifully,
trembling like the first rush
still with our hands outstretched,
 my tongue can break your hunger;
 your tears can ease my thirst;
 and the stripped silence
 will leave us carefully unravelled.

Carl Martin

Cinnamon Rolls

I like to sit on the back porch steps and stare out at the fields as the sun goes down. It's warm today, but there's a slight breeze, just enough to keep me from sweating. Any minute now I'll hear your car tires crunching gravel in the driveway. After you put your golf clubs away and change your shirt, you'll come out here to read the Sunday paper. You'll want to know where the sports section is. I haven't decided yet what to tell you.

I remembered about the sports section while I was driving home from church. I thought about stopping to buy another one, but I didn't. Every Sunday I buy a paper to read at the bakery before church. I haven't done anything wrong this time—I barely even talked to him. We just sat there reading mostly. I don't have anything to hide. If you want your sports section so bad you can drive back into town and get one yourself.

"So we get to the eighteenth, even on the back, one down on the eighteen, right? They won the front so they're fifteen dollars in pocket, but we have four press bets—two on the back and two on the eighteen—'cause they killed us holes ten through fourteen. We came back, but since we're one down with one to go, we can press the eighteen again."

"And you do."

"What the heck, you know? Gibby's hot—he's just sunk from twenty-five."

"On seventeen."

"Correct. So we're playing five separate bets here plus if we win the hole, it gives us a tie on the eighteen."

"Sixty dollars."

"A seventy-five dollar swing if you count the fifteen we already owe."

"Right."

"So Duckie and Frankenstein both knock it in the drink. Unbelievable."

"There's no lake on eighteen, is there?"

"We played the back first. The ostensible eighteenth."

"So you're on nine."

"Correct. Gibby then proceeds to knock his o.b. I, however, keep it in play. No spectacular distance, but in the fairway. So all I have to do is bring it home in regulation and grab the cash. But to add insult to injury, I put my approach within five, tap in, and collect a twenty dollar bonus for the day's only bird."

"Eighty dollars."

"Apiece. That's what Nassau's all about. Win the last hole, win it all."

"Congratulations."

You take off your shoes and stretch back in your chair, squinting into the sun. I lean back on my elbows. The field directly in back of our house is a deep, rich green glazed with silver, cut in half by a line of fir trees. The next field swells up over a hill like an ocean wave gleaming in the sunlight. It reminds me of cinnamon rolls. That's what I had this morning. Two cinnamon rolls.

—So I'm at the bakery, and this man walks up to me and asks if he can read my paper, right? It's kind of crowded so I tell him to go ahead and sit at my table.

—What's he look like?

—I've seen him here before. Bluejeans, t-shirt, sportjacket, and silver-rimmed glasses. His cheeks are dry and pudgy like globs of bread dough. His hair is brown, and looking at it up close for the first time today I notice a few flecks of gray.

—Grad student?

—He's too old to be a student. Maybe he's a teacher.

—What's his name?

—Gordon. Gordon Wilson.

"You want a beer?"

"No."

"Where's the paper?"

"Front hall."

Your socks sliding across wood floor. The newspaper rattling.

"I can't find the sports section."

—Gordon Wilson has it.

It's almost midnight, and I'm washing the dishes. I know our deal is for you to do the Sunday dishes on Monday morning, but I need something to do with my hands. I've got the kitchen lights turned off and the radio turned on very low. I can barely see so I'm sort of doing this by feel. I hold each plate in the warm water, running my fingers back and forth across it

to check for grease. A stream of moonlight slithers through the kitchen window and lands on my knuckles. You've gone up to bed—you're probably reading right now, but you'll be asleep by the time I get upstairs. If you came down here right now, you'd turn the lights on and ask me what the hell I'm doing. But you won't come down here, I know you won't.

My purple blouse only goes with two things: my orange flower pants—too loud for church—and my white cotton skirt—too pure for the bakery. So that's out. What about a white blouse with dark slacks? What time is it? I look like such an executive when I wear slacks. What if I pin my hair back? That's even worse. I need to look comfortable but nice. There's my green dress, but I need to wear a slip with that. Nine twenty-nine. I've got a minute to decide. I can't take this.

I settle on a tan sundress, and I'm almost in my car when you get back from running.

"You look nice."

"Thanks."

I lean over to kiss you, like I'm supposed to, and you grab me and burrow into my neck with your sweaty hair. On the way to the bakery I roll down all the windows to let the wind blow your smell off me.

This is the fifth time I've met him here. Already we've developed certain traditions. We take turns buying the paper: he gets Sports and the front page first, I get Arts and Leisure and the Book Review. He drinks orange juice. I drink coffee. We both eat cinnamon rolls.

Ten thirty-two. He never gets here before ten-thirty, and I have to leave for church at quarter to eleven. I'm trying to think of a casual way to tell him that I want these meetings to last longer. Every time I hear the door squeak open I jerk my head up to see if it's him. You're probably working in the garden right now. You'll just be teeing off by the time I get home. I feel stupid. I should go. I wrap my second roll in a napkin—I'll eat it after church. I take my last sip of coffee and a newspaper slaps down on the table right in front of me. I look up and Gordon Wilson is walking up to the counter to order his breakfast. I feel a jolt inside my chest, like a charge of electricity in my right shoulder shooting down through my lungs and back up the other side. He looks back at me. "Can I get you anything?"

"Another cup of coffee."

—*Breathe. Cool air. In through the mouth and down into the stomach. Let it settle.*

He sits down. "Sorry I'm late."

—*Shrug. Be noncommittal.*

"How are you?"

"Okay. How are you?"

He smiles at me. He makes me feel like he's known for a long time that we'd be friends. The skin of his face looks like a slice of red roast beef. I want to reach out and touch it. But I don't.

"What time do you have to go?"

"In a minute."

One hand is holding his cinnamon roll and the other is resting on the table two inches from my elbow. He's not looking at me but at last night's box scores. It's quarter to. Here goes.

I stand up. "See you next week," he says.

"Come earlier."

"What time?"

"Ten."

He reaches out to shake my hand. His hand is warm and sweaty, the lines in his palm like wrinkles in soft leather. This is the first time I've touched him.

I can see you. Navy blue alligator shirt, Bermuda shorts, golf shoes with no socks, carrying your bag in a pullecart. I can see you as clearly as if I'm parked behind the bushes near the fourteenth green, spying on you. I've done that before, you know. Leaning on your putter at the hip, laughing with your partners, calling them by the nicknames you've invented for them.

Can you see me? Driving home on route one, elbow resting out the window, one hand on the wheel? I lean my head over and smile at myself in the rear-view mirror. I pretend it's you I'm smiling at. I want you to see how relaxed I am.

Now I'm back on the porch again waiting for you to get home. There's a small wasps' nest in the far corner of the ceiling. Good. That'll give us something to talk about at dinner. We're having roast beef tonight, with rice, garlic bread, fruit salad, and frozen yogurt for dessert if you want any.

"How was your game?"

"Peaceful. Not too profitable."

"Did you break even?"

"Won five. Two-fifty split. Barely enough for a beer."

"Did you play well?"

"Eighty. Four birds. Too many bogeys."

You scrape your silverware across the plate. I slide my feet around under the table. The floor's dirty—maybe I'll mop it tonight after you go to sleep.

"How was your day?"

You're looking at me. You can tell I'm nervous. You're about to ask if anything's wrong.

"Do we have any bug spray?"

I lie here with you bending over me, kissing my breasts, part of your prescribed routine of making love. It feels nice as long as you do it lightly. I rest my hand on the back of your head and curl my fingers through your hair. You glance up at me to see if I'm enjoying this. I smile.

—Of course I'm enjoying this.

Looking up at the ceiling I wonder what you would do if the light fixture fell on us. Or the whole ceiling. Or what if we had a shower head up there sprinkling water all over us? Or a fog machine? I should put my mind on what I'm doing.

I reach my arms around your back and pull you down on top of me.

Here's some of my latest work. This is a sketch of Gordon. It doesn't look that much like him except for the cheeks: red and wrinkly and a little bit sweaty. I only put it up when no one else is in the studio. Usually I keep it locked in my desk.

The one in the middle is supposed to be a cinnamon roll. I had this picture in my head of a cinnamon roll so perfect that anyone who saw it would want to eat one immediately. I couldn't get it right, though—it looks more like a mud puddle with streaks of silver. I may take it home and pin it to the kitchen bulletin board.

The one on the right I call "Collection of Lines." I've been drawing a lot of those lately. Somewhere around here I've got a pile of thirty or forty sheets of mostly pink and orange lines shooting randomly in every direction. This is the best one. I keep thinking it's what my insides must look like.

We're with your parents at the beach for labor day weekend. The water is freezing, but we go for an early morning swim anyway. We dive under one wave then run back up and collapse in the sand.

"You cold?"

"A little."

You put your arms around me and drip handfuls of warm sand onto my back. In a few minutes we'll go up and shower off and maybe make love once before your parents wake up.

"What time do you want to leave tomorrow?"

"Are you going to work?"

"No."

"Let's sleep late."

"I want to miss the traffic."

"Right."

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

Behind you I can see a silver line stretching over the water to where the sun is hovering. The silver makes me think of cinnamon. I bury my head in your neck and close my eyes. I listen to the waves crashing on shore and try not to think about anything.

"So is seven okay?"

"For what?"

"For a departure time."

"Fine."

—Do you know this is the first Sunday I haven't seen Gordon since June? He's not a teacher or a student. He's a vice president in charge of marketing for an advertising agency. His building is not too far from my studio, in fact, and he's asked me to meet him sometime for lunch.

—Do you know once I complained about the sun's glare on the newspaper hurting my eyes, and Gordon stood up and walked out of the bakery. He come back a few minutes later with two pairs of Mickey Mouse plastic sunglasses he'd bought at the drugstore across the street. I keep mine in the glove compartment of my car. Sometimes when I'm driving to work I put them on and think of him.

It's our last night here so we cook hamburgers on the grill. Your father makes ice cream for dessert and then we sit out on the porch. You and your father play gin, your mother knits, I try to read. Same as always.

Your father talks a lot. Right now he's telling us about his plans for adding a deck to the house. I imagine I'm touching Gordon, taking his glasses off for him, rubbing his cheeks.

"Susan."

You can't possibly know what's in my brain. Maybe I'm sending out some sort of chemical or vibration that you pick up on. Something that tells you I'm thinking about another man. But you don't ask if anything's wrong.

"What?"

You curl your lips up into a closed-mouth smile and straighten them again. You watch me carefully, your eyes narrow and unblinking, your nostrils stretching outward with each breath.

You know.

It's Wednesday and I'm eating lunch with him downtown. I'm

drinking water, and he's eating a cookie for dessert. I've been to this restaurant with you before, and it's possible I could see someone I know here. It's possible I could see you here.

He's telling me something about his ex-wife. I can tell by the way he swallows after every sentence and speaks very quietly that this is an emotional moment for him. He's telling me this because he wants us to be intimate. He thinks that by sharing this thing with me he'll bring us closer together.

We're holding hands, and he's rubbing his thumb up and down my fingers. I can't return his gaze for more than a few seconds—I keep my eyes on his plate. His cookie is gone. It's time to go. The story about his ex-wife is over. It had to do with something he did to her or she did to him. We walk to his car and sit inside, kissing. After he drives away, I can still feel his fingers on my neck.

I drove home from the movie. We were at a stoplight, and you opened the glove compartment. How did you know to look in there? Underneath all the maps and manuals you found my Mickey Mouse sunglasses.

"What are these?"

I held onto the steering wheel with both hands. My jaw was clenched so tight I felt an ache in my temples.

"What are these?" you said again. A car behind us honked and I pulled away.

You're still waiting for my answer. We're standing in the living room listening to the answering machine. There's a message from your mother and two hangups. You have your hands on the back of the sofa, and you're leaning

forward, staring at me. You want me to speak first. I push the button to replay the messages. The two hangups are from Gordon, I can tell. Your mother wants us to come to dinner. You're still staring at me. I push the button again. You walk upstairs.

What am I supposed to say? I keep thinking of your brother, who writes to you every Christmas. I keep thinking of the way you burn his letters without opening them and sit glaring into the flame with your fists clenched. I keep wondering what he did to you to make you hate him so much.

So how do I answer you? What do I tell you about the glasses?

—Gordon gave them to me.

You've fallen asleep now, and I'm sitting in my bedrode near the window. Outside I can see the fir trees bending in the wind.

—Somebody help me.

My blouse and skirt are soaking wet, but I haven't bothered to take them off. I'm sitting on the bed next to the air conditioner, shivering. Outside it's raining sheets of cold water. I bought two packs of cigarettes in the lobby, and I've given myself until I finish them both to make my decision.

I'm supposed to meet Gordon here, but I'm three hours early. I can't think straight at home. I keep looking at all the pictures of you and thinking that somehow they're a part of you, a part that sees everything I do in the house.

By now your plane has landed and you're on your way home. You'll know I'm not home when you don't see my car. You'll walk in, hang up your coat, put your suitcase on the washing machine. On the kitchen table you'll find a balled-up sheet of paper. If you open it up, you'll see my cinnamon roll drawing, but you won't open it. You'll throw it away and go upstairs for a shower.

I can see you standing barefoot in front of the refrigerator finishing off the ice cream. I can see you glancing at the answering machine to see if anyone's called. I can see you standing in front of the mirror, blowdryer in hand, because you can't sleep with wet hair.

—Eight cigarettes left.

Jon Shain

harlem nocturne

yow cats
runnin wild
shriekin back
the slick nightstreets
dancin jivin
slidey slidin
up and down that crazy beat
chill you with that saxman zonk
goodyear screech
quick low honk
ratta-tat ratta-tat
bap bap boom
sweat craves free
round midnight's womb
trumpet cuts
bull durham smoke
bleatin out
its unbound goal
cool as heaven
jazz my ass
liberate my very soul

Jon Shain

you are cool as an after dinner mint

your eyes are like pineapples
or raindrops or sperm,
chinks in a silken veneer
you tamper with new faces
practicing, then discarding them daily
while i sit, sandaled,
with bongos between my knees
watching you shrivel and expand

you drool your days
over cappuccino and rococo furnishings
dazzling jewelry and playbills
i caress your inner thigh
gently, lightly, unnoticed

under the oppressive midday sun
we talk in semaphore
from opposite sides of the bay

Christopher Henrikson

HIV Positive

HEY YOU

Is that sweat bubbling up on your roof
In between exits on the interstate?
Is that spit
Spewing onto your rear window
At a stop sign on the wrong side of town?
Is that a mosquito bloodied by
Your wiper blade and
Married to your windshield
On a back road not so far from home?
Is that a syringe sucking
The semen from your bald, rubber radials
In the breakdown lane
Of rural route nine?
Is that a Haitian homosexual mounted
On your hood ornament
Speaking in tongues to the parking attendant
With the intravenous eyes?
HEY YOU
They say
There is no cure for
An open automotive wound.

Michelle Longosz



Brian Denton



Bonnie Freid



Eric Green

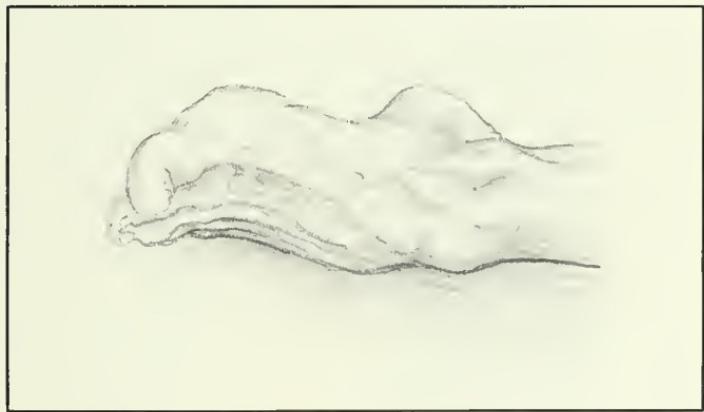


Eric Green





J. Larry Dew



Amie Thomasson



Francesco Marciuliano

Jumpstarting Dad

In the dream I was no older than six. I could tell. Dad's hair was still ash black. We rested near a pond not far from home. Low branches, wooden fingers, pricked the dark skin of the water. A light breeze ruffled the leaves. We talked, Dad and I. We discussed my future and his past. We exchanged bad jokes. We laughed. I insulted him once, not intentionally. His eyes lowered. There was a long period of silence before I sighed a soft apology. He wrapped his strong arms around me. He said he loved me. I heard him say it.

I wanted to twirl the dream slowly in my hand and study its hundred edges. I wanted to remain asleep forever, buried beneath a shroud of cotton and quilt.

I awoke this morning to find Dad face flat to the tiles, between his bedroom and the kitchen. Dead. Again. Third time this month.

I returned home after graduation. Back in time for my life to unravel and seep through my hold. Mom had cancer. I watched her soft, brown skin crack and fade, cool mud beneath an unforgiving sun. The power of her absence crippled Dad, reviving the love they had tucked away while snatching its very breath. Only a matter of time before the inevitable. Heart seized within a year. Alone. Abandoned in the shuddering darkness of an empty home. I needed sanctuary. I needed my family. Touching his raw, gathered self fueled my desire. The authorities were never notified.

The procedure is as usual. Wait until the last light in the neighborhood dims. Bring out Dad on a small flatbed trolley and set him down on the driveway, beside the cars.

The station wagon. A loss of sexual richness. The compact. Impotence. Vehicles complete with dirty ashtrays, torn upholstery, and hairline cracks on the windshield. Balding tires on a poorly paved road of yellow lines and resting squirrels. An ideal destination, perhaps the next exit, where the toast never burns, steak knives never dull, and the girl at the drive-in window always remembers to give extra ketchup packets with your hamburger and fries.

Hood is propped and jumper-cables retrieved from below the passenger's seat. Red "hot" lead to positive, black lead to negative.

Place the opposing prongs on Dad. On his chest. On the only things I can find for terminals.

The machine. The Jaguar XKE. Tether to a quick curveball, abandoned warehouses earmarked for demolition, and open ended nights in alleys of crimson neon. Perfect antidote to marital inertia. Two seats. No room for shopping bags. No room for perambulators or friends of children. No children. Errant. Arrant. Irresponsible. Skid marks in the parking lot of an A&P. A one hundred and sixty mile free flight into days erased.

Dad bought it on his honeymoon. He bought hindsight. The pathetic want of an irretrievable life, the youthful exuberence and flippant disregard it nurtures. All sealed tight with a vow and placed next to an ashtray reading "Sheraton Inn" on one side.

Behind the steering wheel there lies wantoness and a will against a dissolution. An immediate sensation of puberty, of renewal and rebirth. I feel it and smile. With ignition comes a harsh, grinding cough. Fiddle with the AM dial. Muzak. Evangelists. Phone-in talk shows. Crippled tones on dying frequencies. The four tops. Dad's favorite. Press the starter button. Press down on the accelerator. Blind my sight with lively spirits.

"Cancer. Can you believe that, Ben? Cancer!"

Face is grim and tight. Another squabble at home, another two hours on the road. Drives to escape rather than to connect point A with point B. Speed climbs. Dad swerves effortlessly through static traffic.

"Never aware of the warning signs. Never bothered with those home tests you read about. Your mother practically asked for it, Ben! She asked to die!"

"Please. Don't shout."

"Well? Am I right?"

"Yes. You're right. So what? What good does that do?"

"I tried to reason with her. Tried to..."

"All you did was yell, Dad! You two never reason anything out!"

"Please. Don't shout."

"Why do you two argue, Dad? Why can't you be happy with each other or, at the very least, mildly satisfied?"

"Something happens, son. Can't be helped."

"Refuse to believe that. I refuse. You let it happen. Both of you."

"No, Ben. It just happens. Things fall apart. Marriage requires sacrificing freedom of motion. After a period it seems more a waste than a virtue. You want out."

"But faithfulness? What about security?"

"There's a security to be had in perversity as well, Ben."

Wind licks the roof. Engine claws. Leg killing me. Must be
waking everyone up. Please, Dad. Please. Noise swells. It swells.

Dad sneezes.

"You're listening to WFSD 750 AM."

"Eleven, twelve, thirteen. . .five cards, Dad. Five in draw poker. . .
sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. . ."

"Me? Two flushes, one straight, three pairs, and a business card.
You, Dad?"

"They're all face up. Let me deal, Dad."

A cozy, sheltered living room. Trading cards, cereal prizes, lipstick,
and small tin boxes of seemingly inconsequential miscellany arranged
accordingly on a coffee table. Large bookcase stands upright next to a
potted rubber plant. A woman drapes her arms on the shoulders of a
child. A breath of time, captured and framed under a flickering lamp.
Gold candlesticks. Hat and shoes. Stiff pendulum clock. Porcelain
animals lunging forward. A sightless teddy bear. Grocery lists on the
backs of supermarket receipts. Earring in a matchbox.

Bibelots. Trinkets. Sealed potpourri and ornamenated silver, gold
and glass. Thick boundaries and bold groupings interpolated and
softened with meticulous clutter. A panoply of assorted objects.
Within a cocoon of sentimental accumulation Dad and I sit, eyes
forever tracing the restful contours.

"Dad! Remember the acorn wars, Dad?"

A fly crawls across his cheek.

"Parents hated them. Violent. Almost a suburban gang war. Kids
from each street banding together, laying waste to Durham Drive or
Beatrice Court. Every fall. Remember, Dad?"

Reaches his nose. Joined by another.

"One day some streets forged together. Massive assault on our little
band. Somewhere on Greenbriar, I think. Anyway, we were petrified.
Then I realized. I was alone. Teammates? Traitors. All my friends
facing me, saving their own asses. Man, did I go. All the way home,
three feet above the ground. Down the driveway, toward the tool shed.
Felt the first acorn against my left ear. Thought I was dead for certain.
Then. . .I'm sure you remember this, Dad. . .then you appeared, from
the stairs. Heard the commotion. They stopped. You turned them all
away without a word. Do you remember, Dad? Do you?"

Wait for a reply. Muffled cry or moan. A response of faint places
and privileged moments. Events caught in a timeless eddy; scraps of
memories whirled by his breath. Nothing. Lift my hand to thin,
bruised lips. Hope to catch a sigh. A sign. I sense the still, pure air of
the room.

It will be dark in another hour.

"How many more years until you graduate, Ben?"

We pass a string of model homes. Old farmstead now an asphalt prarie with a token shrub and forgotten cow dung.

"One."

"Given any thought to what you might do after college?"

"A little?"

"How little?"

"This and that?"

"This and that. Sounds like menial labor to me. What about childhood goals? What happened to them?"

"University doesn't offer a major in superheroism."

"I'm serious, Ben. Aren't you concerned at all about your future?"

"Rather ignore it."

"What are you going to do? Take your life?"

"No. Just worry about it when it arrives."

"Can't close your eyes forever, Son."

Spot a familiar place coming up on the right. Perfect opportunity to change the subject.

"Look, Dad! The park! Let's pull over!"

"You're a little big for swings, Ben."

"We can walk around. Maybe relax near the pond. C'mon. It's been so long since we last went."

"Not today, son. We better head back so I can straighten things out with your mother."

"What was it this time?"

"Something. Everything, I guess."

Peer through glass doors dividing living room and backyard. Dad gazes above a bowl of hot alphabet soup. Only meal I can prepare besides tuna fish.

"See this, Dad?" Smudge the pane with an index finger. "Redricks built a tennis court behind their house. Plowed over an entire acre of woods. Had some of our best acorn fights back there. Jesus. Just plowed over everything. Didn't give a damn."

Never eats. Maybe he needs some oyster crackers.

"But we lose nothing, right, Dad?" Recollections in journals. Conversations with old friends over a pitcher of beer. A six cylinder flashback to recklessness. Each an altar dressed with hot wicks and cool shadows. Each candle a second consecrated in flames."

Eat. Chew. Make obnoxious slurping noises.

"Let them tear the ground apart. We lose nothing. Salvage it all in wallets, deposit boxes, and wooden cabinets. All cogs in a wristwatch.

Arrange the minutes. Proper sequence. Proper shield."

Spell out names on his spoon. Mom's. Mine. I show it to him. No response.

"Eat your soup before it cools."

Nothing.

"Did you hear me?"

Absolutely nothing.

"EAT IT!"

Flip the bowl. Fog the gaze. Crackle. Seethe. Skin quivers and burns. Raze known features and earned wrinkles. Erosion of an irreplaceable visage.

He melts without so much as the blink of an eye.

"Over there, Dad! Over there!"

Long seam of fawn-colored cows, jaws churning, watching nothing in particular.

"Don't evade the issue. Who gave you the shiner?"

"It's okay, Dad. Doesn't even hurt."

"Those damn wars, right? How many times have I told you to avoid them? Huh? How many?"

"I don't know."

"Who started it? I can go talk to the parents."

"No! Don't! promise?"

"Who then?"

"Some older kids. Junior High. You don't know them."

"You're not lying to me, are you?"

"Crestwood Park! Can we feed the ducks? Can we?"

"Don't have any bread. Besides, your mother probably has dinner ready. You know how impatient she can get."

"But this won't take long! One minute! That's all! One minute! Two at the most!"

"I don't think we have the time."

"Please, Dad? Please?"

"Well..."

"Please?"

Four. Five. Six times. Countless hours behind the wheel only to have him collapse. Chalk sketched falls. Ensnared in a net of fine, white capillaries.

Dad is slouched on a small divan. Wears mittens. Hands shaped and sculpted into wire figurines. Puckered chin, bandages. Slits for breathing and seeing, rarely performed activities.

"Please, Dad? Try to remember."

Show him the picture of Mom and I. Indicate faces. Pronounce names. "Ben, Dad. Ben. B-E-N! Ben!"

Useless. Fit of disgust. Toss the photograph across the room and watch it shatter against the clock. Rings for the first time in ages. Loose gears and springs. I approach the coffee table. Each object a grain of hourglass sand. Each held to the light for inspection and critical appraisal.

"**SOLID GOLD! YOU GAVE THIS EARRING TO MOM!**
THIRD ANNIVERSARY!"

Pelt Dad with lipstick. Opaque marbles. Plastic soldiers. Origins and intrinsic values. Voice extends then breaks. Slips and falls. Collects in the folds of dry lips.

"Dad. . ."

Look around.

"We're leaving, Dad."

Disjointed minutes.

"Did you hear me, dad?"

"I heard you. I heard you."

"Can't wait!"

"Settle down, Ben. How can I drive with you squirming in the car?"

"Can you push me on the swings?"

"Yes."

"Can you? . . ."

"Jesus, Ben. Calm down!"

"I can't wait!"

MOGAN AND PRELINGER INC.

Alabaster columns and large steel frames. Perfect ingredients. Perfect office building.

We sit on a bench outside the entrance. Neck arched over my lap. Ten-thirty in the evening. Patrol car skims a cement pond. Halogen trees rooted in the parking lot. Crestwood Park.

Security guard tosses a paper cup out his window. Ice melts in the amber warmth of the lamps.

Carry the body to the front seat. The drive home is brief and mute. Pull the car into the garage and lower the door. Engine on. Untangle the gauze from the face. Black rivers. Tarred skin and charcoal gums. I rest the head against the dashboard and roll up the windows.

"I hope you like the Four Tops."

Watch slides and jungle gyms diminish to faint points of color in the rear view mirror.

"Thank you, Dad! Thank you!"

"You're welcome, Ben. Just hope we don't catch hell from your

mother."

"I'm sure she'll understand."

"I love you, Ben."

"Stop that, Dad! You're embarrassing me!"

"But I do"

"I love you, too. I guess."

"Do you?"

"I'm starving. Hope dinner will be ready when we get home."

"Already is, Ben."

"How do you know?"

"I can smell it burning from here."

Shona Simpson

Prayer

We have walked a long way, this night;
a dustworn, ragged road, feetweary
and sodden skies weighed us down, drained.
The dust coats our bare souls,
yet we came. What else is left?
For look what I've brought —
A crystal child,
transparent in the light,
his perfect skull porcelain-delicate
veined blue like the veins of the leaf I hold to the burning sun
only not red-golden but alabaster-pale.
White bled from the sheets,
and before we saw or knew
our son faded.
The tears were drying, slowly,
until now:
Christmas.
One year ago —
I whip myself, remembering —
we laughed.
Now each second totters before
crashing into the splintered heap
of treasured moments, wrapped in hushed purple velvet:
they will not come again.
It eats him from the inside out, this.
The doctors praise his courage,
but he is still just a little boy
and misses his hair and his school and soccer.
And so we are here at last.
We have come:
Please.

Twilight fingered,
he opened her hand with his tears
and whispered with the wind
“My child.”

Sally Rosen

Vow of Silence

There's a silence that says
Be no trouble at all
And you married it--
Vowed to stop finding words for the trees.
For twenty years you lived to erase—
Dirt on floors, young coughs, muted loneliness.
Who would ever care to replace
A soft thing without a voice?
You learned to fill in for things that broke down,
To nod and smile when you had long stopped listening.
They marveled at how you could pull things out—
Cakes from ovens, kites from trees, any splinter.
Then when some winter whitened the walls
You reached in for your own words,
Spilling out, staring from uneasy scraps—
Lipstick verses on a napkin in the middle of the night
Reddening into identity.
He said it was a crime to plot poetry—
The scrawled noise shook his senses, rattled the house,
Wouldn't allow him to stay.

Somehow you have more words for him now that he's gone away
And you have windows and paper and don't feel alone.
Outside your daughters twist
Like leaves on the curb,
Poke at romance with their secret giddy songs.
You will have to tell them never
To promise away their words,
Which will make things tremble, which will stand like trees,
Which will always be their own.

Waiting

It's hard to have been loved by people who are dead.
It makes us hate soft music, walk barefoot, write bad poetry.
We have all searched for the signs, we have read
The rain for their voices.
Here where we all expect arrivals, this quiet airport gate,
I watch a mother press her palm to her son's fine hair
And wonder. We can search the air
As long as we like, convince others that when done,
We'll just go home. It's Sunday morning, dawn,
And like some pesky children invading our parents' room
We want to test our rusty voices—
We want to wake them, shake them,
Ask them when they will speak to us again,
Why they are sleeping, why they have lied.
We check our watches, listen
For their numbers to be called.
We are trying not to wait for them. Every minute we have tried.

Moving On

It is too late for those
Old lessons.

It is now. It is fresh like fruit,
A plum pressed raw into a
Greedy sky—
Purpling moon that
Breaches me up.
I am a tide.

And I roll out.
I have ceased to hide
Beneath reflections,
Like a fish that
Breathes the wet
For one swift reddening instant,
Wordless clean exposure
To the dazzle of
Moon, wave, star—the lift of
Bloody evening.

Back again I need to slow for the thick
Pattern, instinct, need to slow to
Meet the depths that swell between us. It takes so long
For your hand to move to me, you speak
And words are floating through languishing numb minutes.

But it is
Now. And it rolls out,
A thrashing wet imperative.
The precise harsh breath
Pumps through me. And it is
Fresh, can't you feel this light
That just might pin us to the sky? I will not wait
For you to start. I am ripe and
Ready, climbing to more moments
Pierced with honest oxygen,
Flung past your trance beneath reflections,
Your old lessons, your slow touch.

Two-Room Hotel

My fathers lived
In the lobby of a two-room hotel.
Its building blocks, foundation. . . all imported,
The first staffers made a long commute.

Some say prophesy foresaw it:
From a rooster to a capon,
From a bull into an ox.
Some say the ancients just wanted a room.

My fathers died
In that two-room hotel.
The lobby littered with their bone-selves;
Occasionally Jesus would come out and set things in order.

Sons came near and wondered:
“My those wolves are plump!
I should eat as they do.”
Some did.

But most,
Exhausted from following the beasts, collapsed
Before the two doors.
Disembodied, the sacred parchment spoke:
And gave instructions,
And gave rules for my fathers to follow,
And gave them a skeleton key.

Two doors:
One is always open
The other, combination locked.

Moon Surge

Looking down the softly glowing column, oiled water glistened and swirled. I was swimming, flying in paisley. A golden rimmed, indigo arch wavered before me, below, a zag of silver and green. Ripples and pulses surged around me, within me.

“Dylan, man. I’ve had enough. Let’s grab a shower.”

“Great idea.”

Together, we let ourselves out of the loft. A pin-striped man stepped into the elevator and looked at us incredulously. Mojo wore boxers, flip-flops, a towel over one shoulder, a mangle of browned hair, a crazy grin, a modern Nero, the perfect hedonist.

I carried a single bar of soap carefully, lest it should drop and shatter.

The doors closed.

Mojo made a curious face and pointed to the back of the suit. The floor gave way beneath us. Mojo met my gaze with a frightened look. Queasy, crumbled, I was falling.

His back grew wider and blacker. It curled around me. Enveloped me. A sudden deceleration snapped the coat back into place. I leaned back against the wall.

A single finger pushed the OPEN DOOR button. The tip of the finger glowed green from the pale green nimbus surrounding the button. Suit-man turned and regarded us with grave eyes to deliver an earth-shattering, ego-busting pronouncement. Mojo was trying to merge himself into the wall.

“You gentlemen ought to wear robes.” He turned and walked with dignity out of the elevator.

I felt a little bad, a twinge of guilt.

A giggle. A hysterical laugh. I looked at Mojo. He had disengaged from the wall and was laughing uncontrollably. Tears ran from his eyes. It seemed funny to me too. I thought of Jenna’s flowered, silk kimono.

“I should have worn Jenna’s robe,” I laughed.

“Just in case,” Mojo said and poked his dick through the flap in his boxers. Just the rounded head hung out, a shiny little secret.

The door began to open and we looked at each other wildly.

“Shit. It’s the lobby. We came too far.” I hit the button and the door closed. The door opened. A woman in a dark and sexless business dress entered. She started. Mojo, stood a little bent over, gut out, vacant eyed.

He was looking directly through her at the point where the doors meet. I leaned casually, bare chested, against the wall. A flush rose to her neck as she turned quickly. She got out on the second floor and never looked back. Mojo and I burst into laughter and were still laughing when we got out of the elevator on the seventh floor.

In the communal bath, white tile and stainless steel gleamed. The perspective was incredible. The long gleaming room seemed to recede into infinity, shiny steel shower stalls on one side, tiled toilets and sinks on the other. It felt like a secret jewelled cave.

"Seecreeettt," echoed Mojo. I punched him on the shoulder. The room was empty.

Into the shower. Each jet of water forced a little depression in my skin. I turned up the heat until my skin glowed red and steam billowed from the stall. Cutting the heat and cranking the cold, I nearly swooned.

Light headed, I grabbed a huge embossed towel and began to dry. The rough towel against my skin. I rubbed my head back and forth, back and forth.

"Later Mojo, I'm heading up."

"Dylan. Man. Do you feel it. This is incredible."

I let myself in and stood breathless, enjoying the stillness of the room. Light flooded through the span of two story windows which ran the length of the apartment. The air was liquid. It splashed into corners mellowing gently. Photons, little sacks of gold, burst against my chest. I waded through the dense air. With a motion of my arms I could swim to the ceiling or float languidly above the lower balcony. The room was pregnant.

Easing down the stairs into the lower balcony, I propped myself up by the window. I thought of Jenna, my soul-mate. I pictured her haranguing a jury in the huge courtroom or sitting intense at her desk, pencil behind an ear.

Tomorrow, Mojo, Ferien, and the two of us were driving to our place in Maine.

The stereo glowed like an ethereal intelligence. I flipped a switch and a smooth network of electric piano, steel guitar and blocks came pouring from the speakers. The music streamed across the room. Pure gold. Music swirled all around me. The trebly music coursed in little rivulets through my legs, between my fingers, across my neck. The bass blasted through my wavering form. Adrenal glands cut in and I could feel excitement coursing, peaking in the screams of the saxophone. I shook a little before collapsing on the couch, a pleasant warmth spreading throughout my body.

Lighting a cigarette, the music receded. Still, it bolstered my mood, like a gentle pillow beneath my spirits. I inhaled deeply, really deeply. I exhaled and the smoke was carried away by the stream of music, now coursing along a fast path, now lingering in an eddy. I wanted to share it all.

Getting up I entered the bedroom. The bed lay unmade, bare to the air, from making love with Jenna before work. It smelled delicious. I threw on a huge pair of shorts, a baggy white oxford hanging loose, a long neon tie.

Where the hell was Mojo?

I reset the disc.

I moved through the double doors and into the men's bath.

There was Mojo, standing in a pile of towels, his back to me, rubbing his head with a towel. He turned and I stood transfixed.

A gleaming towel draped over one eye, laughing eye, insane tangle of hair, fine nose, smooth lips, broad smile, white teeth, pink tongue, tanned neck.

"Dylan. That was incredible."

I stared agape, nodding my head. Mojo turned, smiling, to gather his little bucket of things.

Curve of back.

It was incredible. Golden motes of desire spread outwards into my arms and legs, feet and toes. The motes build up denser and denser. I feel like a glass vessel. I feel ready to explode.

I imagine taking that treasured personality into my arms, caressing a shoulder, stroking hair, kissing lips. I envision the huge unmade bed.

But that was too far. I didn't want that. I love Mojo. Yet, we have never touched, never expressed that love in touch.

Icy silken ribbons cut through the air. They slice up through my gut and out through my chest. Encircling my neck. Vibrating: no, no, no.

"Thanks for coming down, man. I've been standing here rubbing my head for hours. Thanks for coming."

Laughing, I put my arm around his shoulders. "Have I told you that I love you recently."

"Sure, dick," he laughs.

"Who are you calling dick, asshole." We continue with the argument all the way up the elevator and onto the seventh floor.

The molten mote spreads outward. It reaches its limit, and the color deepens and deepens. I play in this tiny inferno.

"Mojo, I . . ."

"What man?"

"Never mind."

I feel that cold ribbon twisting around in the aerial reaches above me. It looks down through the haze at two men sitting on a couch before a window, miles apart. It sees the red heart beating in each tiny frame.

"Dylan, I feel like I'm in an aquarium."

"Totally."

The atmosphere in the room is thick. Light shines through the huge span of glass as if into water.

I remember on a dare, I dove to the bottom of an old quarry. As I grabbed a handful of the bottom, the water around me was black and icy cold. I looked up, way up, to where the sun gleamed through the water as a tiny pinprick in the heavy black atmosphere. Swimming up, I seemed to float through nothingness. My lungs screamed, but I felt detached. I swam upwards through the warming water with my face toward the ever expanding sun.

The glass merged with the surface of the water, the sun reflecting off the opposite building became my sun. I stood and pressed up against the glass.

"Hey Dylan. Babe. Relax."

"Yeah. Whew. We should split."

Letting ourselves out of the loft, I could feel the atmosphere of the room pouring into the hall, dissipating throughout the building. It raged chest high in the corridor outside of the loft. It streamed into little puddles, slipped into the gutters as we left the building and emerged in the sunlit streets of New York City.

Crowds coursed along the sidewalk. The streets brimmed with cars, bikes, trucks. Mojo and I moved uptown. Waves of crowd parted before us. From my shoulders down, I felt immersed in the sound and passion. Above, I floated, quiet, unperturbed.

The crowd spread before me in a huge multicolored plane. Reds circled, blues networked into jagged greys, blacks faded, glowing, into pristine whites. Ethereal mauves, purples and indigo lapped at the walls of buildings, sunk putrid into subways, flowed, rippling into avenues. I was one with the immobile buildings around me: erect, clean, pristine.

Far away, the surface was broken by a golden fountain. It pulsed and surged. Gold dripped onto the surface of the plane, tainting the wildly flowing tints and hues. Fascinated, I watched it flow with the current: waxing now waning, ebbing now flowing. It grew closer. Golden fluid bubbled from the water, arced in parabolas, quietly pulsed upwards.

Fluid gold breaks across my forehead, spatters onto my shoulders. It flows warm across my chest.

A woman stands before me, furtive eyed, worried face. Harried by the crowd, she bears her burden of a child: hands crossed protectively across her swollen womb.

Jenna's face hovers before me: a golden orb, a waxing full moon. She glows with an internal light. Soft words rise and fall. Soft words rise and fall.

Beyond, Mojo and Ferien dance close beneath a shimmering chandelier. He sees me watching and winks. I smile and return my gaze to Jenna. I am lost in her golden form.

Contributors' Notes

Angus Antley was the guy in the back wearing a yarmulke.

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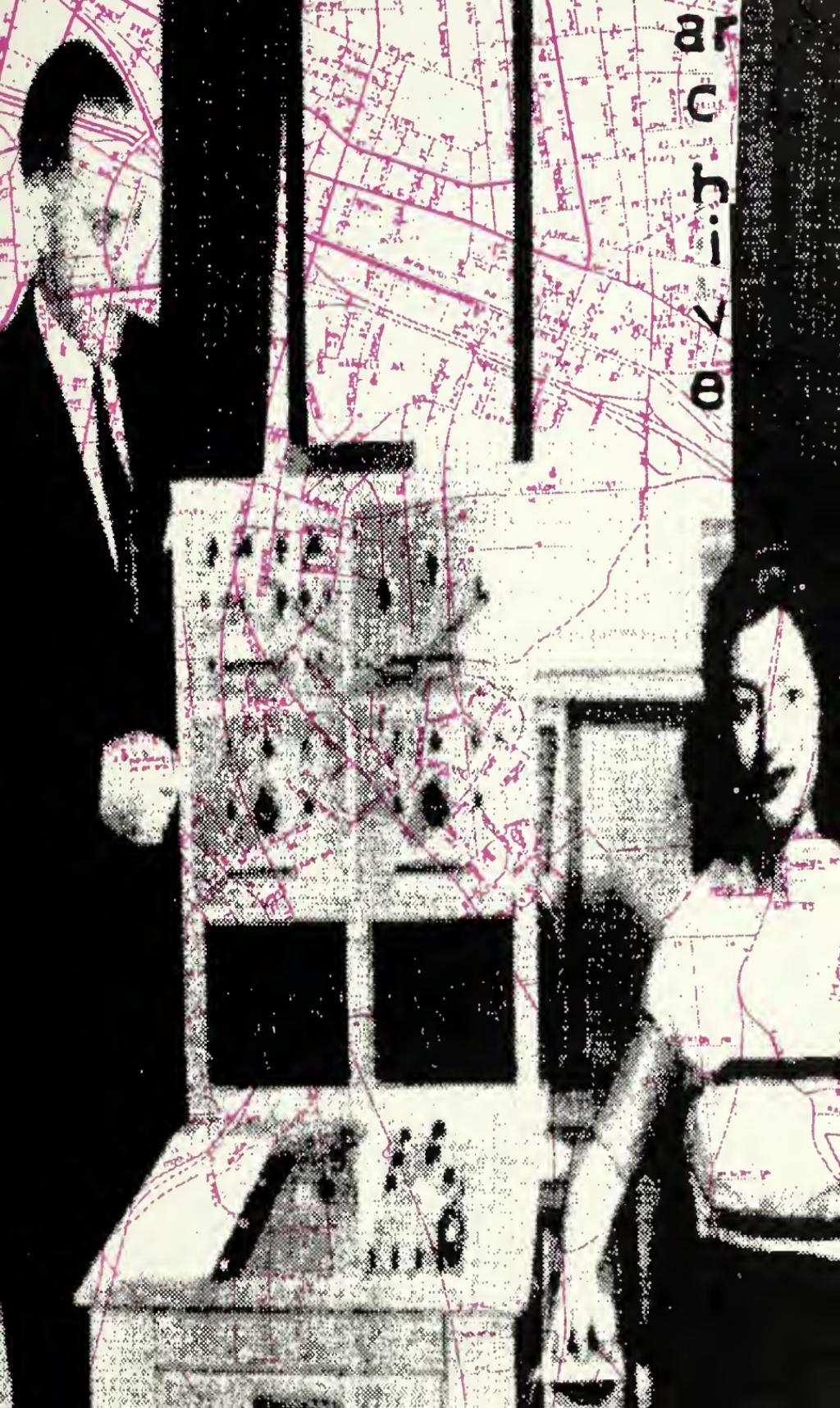
Announcements

The Newman Ivey White Award for Literature is being presented for the eighth year to the Duke undergraduates with the outstanding samples of poetry and fiction in *The Archive*. The judges are selected from the Duke community by the management of the Gothic Bookshop. The names of the judges may not be made public. The prize consists of a \$50 gift certificate to be used at any of the Duke University Stores. The winners of the Newman Ivey White Award for this issue are Francesco Marciuliano for *Jumpstarting Dad* and Senga Carroll for *Summer Wishes*.

Newman Ivey White graduated from Trinity College in 1913 (M.A. 1914) and taught at Trinity College and Duke University from 1919 to 1948, serving as chairman of the Department of English from 1943 to 1948. He edited W.C. Jackson *An Anthology of Verse by American Negroes* (1924) and *American Negro Folk Songs* (1928). In 1943, he became general editor of the Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore.

White was a noted scholar on Shelley and published many works, among them an anthology *The Best of Shelley* (1932), *The Unextinguished Hearth: Shelley and His Contemporary Critics* (1938), a two-volume biography, *Shelley* (1930), and *Portrait of Shelley* (1945).

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Joe Witt

Mama's Little Boy's Grown Up

A Monologue

Knock Knock, who is it, someone, someone who? Someone who knows you. Knock knock, who is it, someone, someone who? Someone who? Someone who knows what you've done. Knock knock. (Nothing.) Knock knock, who is it? WHO IS IT? I ask, and it says, "You know..." I heard that yesterday, the day before and I hear it now. I hear you, you son of a bitch. See, I know that you know, and I'm not sorry. Rap that a couple of times and see how it feels. Knock it real good and then get the hell away, because I don't need the guilt. You hear me? I got tele-Evangelists tuned in on the radio who knock better than you. I got... Get out of here. You know what I think? You couldn't find where they're buried if I drew a map and shoved it up your— You couldn't find them anyway. Its been a long time now. They're soaking down in some underground river as we speak, and in a couple of weeks everything but the bones'll be fifty miles from here... Sailing out to sea. I've got a gun. It just spits water, but I do have a cowboy hat, some pictures of horses and a six-pack. But it's warm. The fridge don't work, see, on account of the dark. Somebody killed the power about a week ago. The phone went the next day and the day after that I nailed the door shut... So I can't really go and do anything about it, right? At night, in the dark, I lie on the floor in my skivvies and listen to the couple below me. They don't have a TV, but I can tell they're in love. I can tell 'cause there isn't any sound. That means they're doing it. Yeah. They must stuff socks in their mouths or something so I can't hear, which means they know I'm up here... Which means I should probably care. I don't. No, I don't care 'cause all I know is that I'm lying on what feels like a slab of ice. After a while I have to put my clothes on, it's that cold. My mother gave me this shirt. I've never worn it in public because it looks like something she might wear. I ripped the buttons off. It was an accident. You can tell it's too small. Fine for my mother, but too small for me. She gave it to me when she died. Actually I stole it, but after all, it was my mother's! Jesus, you don't steal from your mother, what's wrong with you? You are one sick mother fu- Shame on you. If people found out, they'd lock you up. Stealing from your— That's like pissing in a graveyard, it's just not done. Wait. Did you hear that? That's the couple downstairs I mentioned: the Smiths or the Shits or whatever. They got a real nice place. I've only seen it once. Way back when they moved in. It's one of them sod houses on four sides with wood planks on top. Real nice

insulation. That's what the cowboys used out west even. Take a little sod, a little buffalo chips, put it in a big pile, tunnel out some windows, and move right in. Real nice insulation. Keeps your bones warm on bitter cold nights. Knock knock, who is it? (In a mock woman's voice.) I'm in the shower right now! Listen, this is getting tired, I got an idea. You admit to everyone whatever you've got below your place, and I'll admit to killing the Shits—Smiths. I know you know. You'd have to be deaf, dumb, and in the dark not to. Knock knock! Who is it? I also have a real sharp knife in my pocket. I've been saving it till now like it was my last cigarette. Funny how people do that. I'm going to cut the shit out of someone... I knew that would shut you up. You bored? Cause if you are, just kick in that door and we'll have ourselves some down home fun. Ahh, you're knocking again. That's a good sign. I got scared there for a moment. Knock knock... Who's there?... Just me in my underwear... On the floor... Nailed the door... Think I'll hear you knock some more...

Kathleen Wilson

Ferdinand and Isabel

I grapple with dead myths,
never find any substance
in your disgusting bad breath of talk,
hidden in the dry taste of childhood chalk
that draws the distance of religion
as boundary
between you and me,
separated as a king and a queen.

You are supported by only nursery rhymes
of Adam and Eve,
and Jesus Christ
with a subtle sieve
to sift out who he doesn't need.

Clutching your skeleton's hand,
I pray for my flesh
as it crumbles to dust
with your touch of
clean bone,
thrown for me
to chew on.
But these splinters
in my tongue
are not worth
the dry kisses you bestow
from a cage without skin.

Your fairy tales rage a war,
counting me as a casualty.
You worship the myth of miracles,
push me to the edge of hysterical,
insisting that bread and fishes
can multiply and make plenty
in a land of scarcity.

Kathleen Wilson

For Sale

Red elephant,
stuffed but still alive,
seeps into a dream
as the wild inhabitant of my bedside table.
Keeps me company in in my canopy,
a night protector
trumpeting my sleepwalk
through the forest across the street,
guiding me safely through
the tangled jungle
printed on my sheets.

How could I know
a cheery yellow house would descend,
crush a Disney wilderness with adult pretend?
How could I know
it would replace
my private storehouse
of arrowheads and acorns,
tether my red elephant,
and teetthed his one stump leg
between swallowing jaws?

On summer days that followed,
fighting acid street heat
with Cherry Kool-Aid relief,
fantasy melted quicker than
forgotten liquorice in my pocket.
Atrophy settled in,
my muscles aged like mold.

I couldn't budge from the front porch swing,
watching as my legs
grew dangling and awkward,
fascinated when they started
to drag across the warped wood.
I hung there like the for sale sign
on dead Mr. McGregor's haunted house,
a useless piece of words
because nobody would go near.

Scraped by rust's intrusive, arthritic fingers,
pushing me back and forth,
battered in the Southern breeze
made gusty by
saturated age mellowed down
in a Tennessee town,
I sit and wait
for the red elephant
to appear,
majestic and triumphant
over my fear.

Christopher Foster

Reading, Reagan, and Religion

When Hitler spun his office chair
to the window poised above the boulevard,
the duck-stepping Nutcrackers, row by row,
popped their salutes and spun their heads.
He whipped back his hair tottering over his forehead
and spilled a teethy grin.
In the year zero, the still place hit.

Just as a motorbike streams through the suburbs
or as a paddle boat barges through a perfectly man-made lake,
I motor towards the altar.
A kneeling child whispers a Sesame Street rhyme:
“Which one of these is not like the others. . .”
Father Berry pushes forth his hand and drops the offering.
The bread totters in my hand like a flipped nickel spinning.

At night, often, when masturbation and Nytol fail me
I count the cracks in God’s ceiling above me
or sheep marching.
I plan to dream of power and Reagan.
of mean things, sexual things.
Popping the Sony Walkman padding bubbles
gives me the edge.
I dream of souls popping in hell.
Onward Christian soldiers,
marching towards the sunsets,
over the cliffs.

Christopher Foster

Braxton Estates

The greater part of it we know:
the eternal ambiance
of living in these small, picket fence houses
the gate sign saying "Braxton Estates"
the spare trees sprawling like acupuncture pens
and the small toy dogs that rush the door
at the sound of the bell.

These are stuffed.

We inherit this somehow
moving up
ascending
to these suburban rest homes.
The relentless kickballs bounce
up and down the driveways.
The kids point out figures
in the neighborhood clouds that pass by.

We adjust the satellite dish.
We ourselves now come into focus.

We call the kids rough material,
raw bone.
We chisel 'em,
mold 'em.
And they spin on the spinning pottery platter.
We shape them faceless,
dress them in Izod colors,
wind them up.

And when they have hardened,
when they're frozen,
when their eyes move slowly,
we will say,
"Such a nice boy.
He is such a nice boy."

Francesco Marciuliano

Does It Make A Sound?

Listen. The swinging of the pendulum clock. She paces the kitchen floor in her slippers, the cloth faces of two pink rabbits smiling up from her toes. Magnets in the shape of toll house cookies hold up coupons and a free dog calendar from the bank. Retrievers for January. The bookstore is closed on Mondays, leaving her with twenty-four hours of uninterrupted silence. She runs a damp cloth across the tablecloth, collecting extra crumbs in her cupped palm. She arranges pens in size order by the can-opener. She sighs.

3:15 P.M. Sitting by the bay window, a mug of hot chocolate cradled on her knees. Children scurry from the bus, each mummified in knitted scarves and embroidered caps. A single tear rests in the shallow groove between her nose and upper lip.

He welcomes work. The extra assignment. The short lunch break. Half a doughnut in the afternoon. A cigarette dances between two fingers, the plume of smoke rising to the constant hum of the ceiling lights. Comfort.

At night he clings for dear life to the contour sheet. The window pane and blinds cast shadows in the form of Japanese characters. Fears slither up his spine, coil around the neck, and hiss in the ears, cursing his dreams. He folds the pillow around his face, imagining his head pressed between his mother's breasts. Her warm breath soothes his fine hair. Dread collects at his feet and then retreats to the edge of the bed. Hush, my child. Hush.

She sits behind the register, studying old Mrs. Carluni from the corner of her eye. The elderly woman turns her head and beams proudly. "Tomatoes," she whispers. "This year Benny and I are planting tomatoes." They always start too soon, losing the crops to a late frost. The couple is then left passing the summer months behind a screened porch, looking at a woeful patch of bare earth and finding consolation in the clasp of each other's hand.

She watches Mrs. Carluni's long, bone-white fingers caress the cover of an old horticulture text. She wants to follow her home, watch as the couple undress and slowly gather themselves underneath the quilts. Two frail forms finding solace in the early evening, protected by family portraits, heirlooms, and the noxious smell of cotton balls, the very odor

of boxed and crated memories.

"Will that be all?" She rings up the purchase.

"Baseball? So soon?"

He props himself in front of the monitor, face bathed in a pale green hue. The cursor flickers incessantly, each blink a snicker, a silent laugh at his expense. Harlan sits beside him, one leg draped over the other with the sports page spread between his arms. Twenty-five if that old. Married. One daughter. Spends his lunch hours in a nearby hotel room he shares with Katherine from Accounting.

"Spring hardly got underway!" A frown creases Harlan's forehead. "Pitcher will catch pneumonia by the fourth inning."

The words echo in his ears but go unheard. He can feel the daily mask slipping, exposing the dark recesses below his eyes. Countless nights with his chin pressed against his knees. Countless nights recalling his mother's moist breath. Can anyone tell? Can anyone see the faint streaks that run down his cheeks?

"Flop! Fourth inning. Dead pitcher."

At home he watches the moon through his bedroom window until he sees its burning ridge behind closed eyes. A friend for the night.

A gentle breeze rustles her skirt. A walk through the park each morning. A little out of her way but no one will know. Besides, the store never has a customer before noon. She revels in the children's laughter, the high-pitched yelp of a stray dog, the drop of dew swaddled in the curled edges of a leaf. For this the store can wait. She unbraids her hair, letting it tickle the nape of her neck. Yes, the store can wait.

A rubber ball rolls in front of her feet. She crouches down and is greeted by the walnut eyes of a small boy. His brows knit together, lips parting with fear. He spins around and stumbles back to his mother, choking on his tears.

Is it something in her expression? Something about her appearance or her very person? She feels ugly, an intense hatred of herself. What did he see? She was just going to help, nothing more. What should she have done? Damn him. Damn him. She kicks the ball aside with the instep of her shoe.

The cat leaves an arch of sweat across his lap. The air conditioner is down again. He is clad only in boxers and an undershirt, drawing the blinds so as not to disturb the neighbors. The bellow of the television fills the room. He cannot face the bed tonight.

"Warm milk? Exercise?" His boss smiled kindly, assuming genuine, grandfatherly concern. Someone had tipped off the old man, Harlan. Must have been Harlan. True, he has been looking rather haggard, but why tell the boss? Why endanger his career?

"Books. You ever read before going to bed?"

The cat nestles against his stomach, content in its dream.

He wanders aimlessly in and out of the aisles. She fills in a crossword puzzle behind the counter. He recognizes very few of the authors. Some he is unable to pronounce. Faulkner. He remembers taking a Faulkner class in college to fulfill a humanities requirement. He remembers hating Faulkner.

She glances up at this hapless sight, watching him flip to the back of each novel to see how many pages there are. Full mouth. Long lashes, far too long for a man. Looks tired.

Great Expectations. Was that the one about the orphan? Or was that Oliver Twist? Or David Copperfield? Or was Dickens an orphan? One of these starred Alister Sim. No, they show that at Christmas. Or is that the one with Jimmy Stewart?

"Can I help you?" She leans across the counter, elbows crooked and supporting her head.

"Is this any good?" He holds up Great Expectations. "I mean... will it help me fall to sleep?"

"In a second." He looks tired and frightened. What is waiting for him at home? What does he look like in the morning?

"Fine. I'll take it." He imagines her breath behind his ear, her arms around his waist.

He collects his purchase, his change, and smiles. The tin bells above the door jingle. He once again feels the sun scald his head. She fills in seventeen across, the pencil breaking in her hand.

Air opens out

The color in her face, slow
comes with the morning.
She tucks the hair behind an ear
moves around the table
in flannel and jeans;
a bird calls her name from the yard.

Touched, the screen door opens,
slides silent in the dry sunrise cool.
Dry dishtowel in hand,
she sniffs the fields, the fluttering
woods across the road. Unpainted
porch warms her face from the heel up
until her cheeks are bronzed.
Air opens out
under the pines, a waterless
void in the shape of her body;
she walks into it
dishtowel left on the railing.

Upstairs the sun has crept in bed with him.
Curled up at his side
glowing like secret, glowing.
But he is dreaming she is gone,
Can hear the wind in a strand of her hair
can feel the universe ease
into the space where she was,
some deflation in the corner of his mind -
he cannot cradle the sun
nor wake to the day alone.

Tara Shoemaker

Rocketman

My uncle
knows the system.
Works it like Robert Redford,
only less blond. He taught me
to love the tick of the highway
under my tires. A little money,
a little chocolate, a sleeping bag,
and a journal — take that exit, baby.
Get on a boat
and your backyard leads to any coastline.
You want to loose your ache?
stand up straight
and stretch your brain in a foreign sun.
You can be Alice through the rabbit hole —
only falling skyward.

Christopher Henrikson

Recess

I remember
buck-toothed blondes,
cheez curled cheeks,
crayon bombs melting
on red-hot radiators,
cootie-catching chaos,
hairy Sherry's
ballbreaking
Kung Fu kicks,
lunchbox lingo,
incubator chicks
in learning lab
popping from eggs
pasteurized and
permed for
class consumption,
Lino Pucci pencil-piercing
hands for fun,
blood bubbling
band aid blues
on nurses knees,
kickballs call
first pick last
pick first pick last
pick first pick me
I'm tall
standing in my
kindergarden grass.

Senga Carroll

Songs Against the Dark

There are no
final ways
of telling you.

But listen.

Are you afraid
we will come to nothing?
I hoard you
like pieces of gold.
I know you
like a familiar room
in darkness.

Your face
fits the space
where I have
cupped air.

I am the person
from whom
you must take,
the silky underbelly,
the leg up.

You will always find me
walking towards you,
something in my hands,
flowers, this poem,
the smell of spring earth
I have been digging in.

Senga Carroll

Anniversary

Years together,
and I wake early,
turning to put my arms
around you,
listen to your breathing.
Around seven I get up,
go downstairs.
The rooms of our house
are spare, light-filled;
the kitchen is splashed
with morning sun.
I watch the coffee drip,
try to remember a time
when I didn't love you.
Carrying the tray upstairs
I carefully push open
the door to our room,
walk over,
feeling shy,
set the mug down,
kneel beside you.
Your face is closed
in dreaming.
I lean across,
whisper into your hair,
You are what I wanted.

Katherine Randolph

To A Child Molester

I know its been a while
but I can't apologize for being out of touch or
with a letter perfect etiquette insert
How are you? I am fine.
This isn't a thank you note or obliging letter to Grandma.
In fact you can't be glad to hear from me—
A note insisting on being opened,
Requiring at least that you throw it away.

However, I did want you to know that I got your letter.
The one written in childish script for an 18 year old
A harmless blue envelope with my parents' names
Because four year olds can't read.
In it you offer to pay for any damages done me.
I'd ask for a check but you probably
had in mind a sweet silencing lollipop.
My brother saw what you did
Told my mother to cover my nakedness and shame
The first of a long line of male spokesmen.
My father had a long talk with you.

We got your letter.
Your mother felt very badly about it all.
The last I remember was Food Fair
Mommy started crying and we had to leave
without our Cocoa Puffs.
I was so afraid she was hurt.
When I was older than six, she said you were there that day.
She doesn't hate anyone.

The summer we moved back there
I guess most people said I went crazy.
Drove the car downtown after my brother
Took off my clothes among the cars to say
There's a problem with my body.
He found my dress,
Told my mother to cover my nakedness.

The fatherly shrink decided I was
under too much stress at school
Barbie still hadn't learned to talk
She accepted what others told her
Kept her legs closed and loved her pink dream house.
Her painted lips ached with a permanent smile.

This babydoll has learned to do more than cry "Mama"
I can't breathe for your hand on my mouth but
my lips are moving—the words grate across,
my teeth chatter but out it finally comes—
You bastard.

Eric Slavin

In the Old House

The Flexible Flyer has rusted in the garage,
one of the boards has been broken.

Long time since we took it down old glory, think
we could give it a spin this winter,
maybe you'd
take off from work or something?
I'd cut school.

We'd go back behind the A.B. Davis parking lot
one Wednesday morning.

That day we snuck Mom's wig
for a lady snowman.

School was snowed out
and nothing but soap operas were on
So Mom was with Toni drinking coffee
You, snoring with a book on your chest
(Father, are you sleeping still?)

You said you were reading,
watching the game

So I put on my mittens and galoshes
You almost forgot the carrot,
remember? The stationwagon skidded in the driveway
and the streets had just been plowed
The tool chest in the back beneath the carpet,
do you still have it?

There was a hacksaw and sandpaper we can, you know,
fix up the sleigh, wipe down the blades.

Long time since we took it off the shelf
Remember, I beat you down.

J. Larry Dew



Lisa Oakley



Lisa Oakley



Louisa Tio



Louisa Tio



Noeha Coutry



Noeha Country



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Nick Sholley



Carrie Sackett



Lance Walker



Margaret Curtis



Marie DeFrances



Jodi-Beth McCain

Autumn, Pisgah

Trees fused in darkness,
Only the fire flashed orange.
Our breath in small clouds
Softened the stars,
Couldn't warm our noses.
Upstream, Kathleen and Becky
Sang of Carolina.

We shared a mummy bag,
Our backs on the rock island
As chill as Broad River.
You explained,
It's like a glowing white thread
Pulled quickly
Through a fold in the sky.
That green star— it's Jupiter.

Only the falls and leaves conversed.
I felt the first streak
In your hushed tensing.
Then tumbling from a long time ago,
A star flashed for me.

Open Classroom

This is not an excuse; I've often been accused of making excuses. I just want to my mother to know I do remember.

In 1973 I returned to Craymon school after summer vacation and found it changed. My parents received a postcard in early August saying I would be in Mrs. Harrison's level five class and that the school was adopting a new, more progressive teaching method. My mother got the postcard and thought about how great being young in the early seventies was.

I was eight and told people that I was going into the third grade. My mother remembered third grade as the most difficult year of her life. That was the year she had been expected to memorize the multiplication tables. She hadn't. Her mother received many phone calls from Mrs. Raymond, her teacher. It seemed to Mrs. Raymond that little Frances was not getting enough sleep and that Frances spent too much time reading comic books. Mrs. Raymond said she had never had a student who simply refused to learn her times tables. This was Mrs. Raymond's problem.

My mother was not refusing to learn the multiplication tables, she was just having trouble. She wanted to learn her times tables, she wanted to be good. She just couldn't and she didn't really know why.

My mother was in the Peace Corps when Time Magazine introduced James Taylor as an upper class, twenty-two year old folk singer with two gold records. James Taylor was addicted to heroin and that was the story. My mother hadn't heard of James Taylor until she saw him on the cover of Time. He was thin and bony with long hair like my father and her husband.

She thought of the life she could have been living in the States; she didn't have to leave to escape. She decided to come back. There was too much to miss. Last night my mother got drunk and told me how lonely she had felt stuck in Peru with a sickly child no one understood. Then she cried and cried. I didn't say anything because she was crying about me.

My mother was lovely especially when she wore beads and pulled her straight blond hair back into a ponytail. It was all one length and my younger sister would help my mother brush it. I hope I remember my sister little and my mother young. My father also wore a ponytail. He wore snake skin boots made from the hide of a boa constrictor he had killed in the

Amazon. Sometimes I'd help him polish them.

My mother drove me to school the first day of classes. She met Mrs. Harrison who was young, younger than she. Mrs. Harrison smelled like apricots. My mother introduced herself to the new school nurse who was very organized. The old school nurse had developed a bit of a prescription drug problem and had left quietly over the summer. My mother gave the nurse my Ritalin and my Lithium.

Normally I rode to school in a white van. Some of the kids at my school had trouble leaving their parents in the morning. Often we'd have to wait a long time for some of the kids to get on the bus. They would kick and they would scream. The bus driver Mr. Tom would not move the bus until everyone was quiet; that was a rule that never changed. The bus driver before Mr. Tom had been fired. One day the van broke down on the highway and he left the van to walk to a gas station about a mile away. Mike Pond had been asleep when the van broke down. School wore him out; he tried very hard and wasn't very smart.

Mike Pond woke up just as some kids on the van began to fight. Mike was disoriented and got very afraid. He panicked and ran out of the van. He got hit by a car about fifty yards from the van. The van driver got arrested walking back to the van twenty minutes later.

When I saw Mike get hit by the car, I sat back down and held the pencil holder I had made in art class against my chest. I don't cry when I get afraid, I just stay very still.

My younger sister walked to the public school down the street. The summer after what I considered second grade I learned to ride a bicycle. One of the retarded kids who was twelve taught me. He was the son of Mr. Tom, the bus driver. There were no students in Craymon older than twelve. My mother didn't like me playing with the retarded kids.

I asked my mother, as she drove me to school that first day, if I could ever ride my bike to school. She said that Craymon was too far away, but if I wanted, I could pick up my sister on Wednesdays and Fridays and walk her home. Those were the days that my mother had signed Joy up for after school piano and art classes. I would have liked those classes.

My mother left me with Mrs. Harrison and told me to be good. The playground was small. It was a fifty yard square of blacktop with a grassy area that was big enough for five picnic tables. There were no swings; there were plenty of red rubber balls of all sizes.

Over the summer most of the school building's walls had been torn out. Craymon had fifty students, grouped into six levels depending on ability. I had started in level three when I was four years old. The school counselor had told my parents she thought I would be through level six by the time I was ten. My mother didn't like it when I was in level three, there were children as old as eleven in my group. I left Craymon in the late spring of

third grade when my parents moved. My mother just enrolled me in public school and let them try to figure me out.

Mrs. Harrison taught level five and all the kids were about my age. With the walls gone there were no classrooms left. All the kids were together in one large room. The room was divided up by the different colors of the rug; there were eight colors in all.

The first day we were all given lapboards with our names on them. The lapboard had two bean bags dangling off the bottom and had handles on the sides. It looked like a serving tray. Almost immediately someone got hit over the head; this would be a recurring problem throughout the year. We were also assigned a personal cubby hole where we would put our coats and lunches in the morning and where we would store our lapboards in the afternoon. We weren't told how the school was going to work, we would learn by doing.

And so the mission at Craymon had changed. I could never get comfortable using a lapboard; I would sit on my heels, I would lie on my stomach, I would sit Indian style, I would lie on my side. No matter what I tried, my back hurt. I've got bad posture, but that's not an excuse. No one ever told me to practice my composure.

But nothing else really changed. The lapboards were the only real difference. By Thanksgiving all the level five students were moving around the room together, changing modules every fifty minutes. The few retarded kids at Craymon stayed in the yellow area all day.

There was blue area in the middle of the classroom; it was the rest area with pillows and ear plugs. Mrs. Harrison said it wan't for me or for anyone else in level five. I took a lot of tests that year: pre-tests, post-tests, review tests, diagnostic tests, test tests.

Our school didn't put on a play, but on a Thursday night in the late winter we staged a circus for the parents. The parents came to school on the first Thursday night of the month for coffee, to meet informally with the teachers and support each other. My mother would always come home after those meetings very glad that I was only a bed wetter. Several of my friends at Craymon went through phases where they killed family pets.

The circus was an exciting event. We practiced an hour a day for three weeks. I was the lion tamer. In years past some of the younger girls had dressed up in tiger striped leotards, got on all fours and growled; they were the lions. But this year the lions were made out of paper mach'C'B and I wasn't able to help paint them, I was too messy. Though the lions didn't move, being the lion tamer was considered a great honor.

It wasn't until the night of the circus when I stepped in front of all the parents that I finally realized how silly it was to be cracking a whip at paper mach'C'B lions.

There were weight lifters who lifted paper mach'C'B barbells. A couple of kids played the piano. Jimmy Paggler could juggle four tennis balls so he was the juggler. Jimmy Paggler was ten and very smart. He wasn't

allowed to come over to play because my mother had heard bad things about him.

Mike Pond could pop wheelies on his wheelchair. I don't know exactly what Mike Pond was; I guess he was the wheelchair acrobat. Mike Pond had spent three months in the wheelchair after the accident.

Most of the other kids were either clowns or ballerinas. And at the end of the circus we all would sing a song together, everyone was in the chorus.

Two bad things happened the night of the circus. Jimmy Paggler the juggler was not allowed to come. His mother had a friend over that afternoon. Jimmy took a shit on his hands and brought it to the living room because he wanted attention.

And right before the circus was about to begin one of the clowns got very excited and had an epileptic seizure. Kids had seizures all the time, but it was frightening. Some of the ballerinas began to cry and wanted to go home. I bit my lip and threw up on the brown part of the rug. My father picked me up and rubbed my back. He told me to calm down and that everything would be all right.

And after five minutes everything was all right. The circus went on as planned. There was no stage. There was a large circle of black tape on the carpet, and all the students sat around it. The parents sat in chairs behind the students. I came out and tamed the lions. There were five lions that didn't move and a couple of the clowns growled from the side to add atmosphere.

My mother took a picture and later she told me how proud she was of me. I didn't stay out in the ring long.

At the end of the circus I got back in the ring with everyone else and sang. All the parents sang, we all sang. Right now we're having trouble, and I'm sorry but I don't know what to do.

Deborah Pope

Poem

I live at the end
of a country road.
No one comes this far.
I could stand all day
in the center
and never need move.
I have wanted
to never need move.
As now,
with this day
on the fulcrum of evening
when one thinks
how like dawn
the light is,
the distant snowcap of moon
dimming or deepening
in a sky blank and still
as a northern lake
at sunrise.
The first bats appear,
black and stuttering,
falling level with
the tops of trees,
while beyond the near ring
the woods cease slowly
to be penetrable,
even thickening
through them like smoke,
trees blackening
as if fire
has touched them.

How right it feels
to wait here,
how like my life
this evening turning
quietly, imperceptibly,
always with that light
that could be lifting,
that is almost like
beginning.
I have wanted this
time to track
where the tip
of evening comes,
have wanted to be
looking how dark
first ripples outward
in the startled mirror.
It is so still.
It is so final.
Words would carry far
if someone spoke them.

Deborah Pope

Two in the Moon

I saw it, too, you know,
that full, high, winter
moon you said you meant
to tell me of, stood
by the cold, dark glass
at two in the morning,
after you had gone,
watching it wash the porch
in light so clear

and tangible it made
the rest of the world
seem blank and indistinct,
this house a blur, its trees
mere brushwork,
and only itself seem true,
even the porch chairs
held their thin arms
open to it, pure, fulfilled.

How real and unreal it was,
as we were through that
whole, long sliding dream,
touched and untouched,
believing we were new,
moving in the silvered wind,
without map, without references,
all we knew reversed,
as that light, at once
covering and cruel.

If you had asked me then
to come with you,
in what raw world would
we be walking now,
would I see that light
as sign, its way simple
as stepping through a negative,
or as it haunts in memory
bright as the gleam
of a blade, its tip
already slitting
our last night to stars.

Michael Rosovsky

Pulling up Quack Grass

Pulling up Quack Grass,
I cursed her and her crazy
Garden, too. She laughed and
Brought me Iced Tea. The mint
is fresh, she said.

What about this lawnmower,
I demanded, (A hand powered
Yard Sale white elephant)
She said to pretend I was
Pulling a rickshaw through
The streets of Hong Kong.

Seventy pound sack of manure
On my shoulders, and I
Dumped it in defiance.
We circled it warily,
Like boxers. She stared
Me down and I got the shovel.

I showered and put on
Fresh clothes and lit the coals.
We admired the Rosebushes
And sat in the garden
Until night.

We kissed, and I showed her the
Blisters on my hands. She said
She'd toughen me up.

Right justify

We are the black-stockinged men.
We are the doordies, the office supplies,
 the paper weights.

We fill an unfinished circle
 in some inferno.

The circle will surely get much wider,
 but it could not get much whiter.
The future goes from black to red
 to black again.

We like it when its black,
but we probably wouldn't hire one.

We are the starched souls,
 Prufrock and Snodgrass,
 the Timid and the Kickass.
We presume your resumes
 to be insufficient.

Your rejection resides with us.
We extend it like some obscene handshake:
 buzzer shock, ball rock, xerox bellyache.

We are the greying men,
 the executive Zen,
 the shit-filled pigs
 in a shit-filled pen.

Thaw and Frost

It was only one week since Marion had tilled the soil and planted the seeds, but already she had to start weeding. A bone-rattling wind had greeted her at the warped and weathered storm door, so she went back in to better insulate herself. She lifted a plaid scarf from a nail next to the sink. She tried to remember if she had yet used it as a dishtowel since the last washing. No, not as a dishtowel, so she wrapped it around her neck and let it fall across her shoulders. With squinted eyes, she greeted the sun and wind as equal annoyances and pushed on to the garden.

Twenty by sixty feet, the fertile plot was modest relative to local standards. In this part of the country, cranberry bogs and vegetable stand fields stretched over acres. As far as Marion knew, this was the smallest profit-making garden in Winton. She and her husband, Will, had operated a small stand off of 28-A that drew in a few tourists. She helped him pick and carry the harvest of tomatoes and onions and lettuce up to the roadside. Every few years, they would plant a stand of corn, which sold so easily that they were lucky to have a couple of ears left for themselves. On rainy days, she would weave grape vine wreaths and baskets, which served quite well as complement to produce sales.

But now that Will was gone, much more work fell to Marion. The tilling and planting had been her job, and now she had to tend to the weeding, a chore that would carry her all the way to mid-fall, most likely. She was glad for the extra work, though, because it kept her mind occupied. With her bare hands, she scooped and poked at the soil until she felt the tiny root systems. From there, she knew exactly how hard and in what direction she should pull to get as much of the weed out of the ground as possible. She had watched Will on many occasions use this technique, careful not to disturb any of the vegetable seeds or bulbs that were waiting their time. As he had prescribed, she used only bare hands and fingers as her tools when she weeded. No gloves or fancy weed extractors were necessary. She remembered what he liked to say: "One should always be naked when taking from the earth though it is all right to be clothed when giving to it." That was Will's way of saying, "No tools for weeds or harvest, but a hoe is okay otherwise." His not-so-secret dream was to write for The Farmer's Almanac.

Marion felt the soil wedge under her fingernails, tight black. She used to regard this as an unpleasant sensation, but now it was a pleasant

reminder of her independence. With hands chilled deep beyond the bone, weeding was a righteous task, the best way possible to spend her time on this earth. She reached down to squelch two more young, green lives with a three-fingered clamp and a half-turn of her wrist. Indeed, this was the joy of gardening, the taming of the wild.

Two months later, after she had noticed the beginnings of seasonal traffic on 28-A, Marion heard gravel grinding in the driveway. Kinking the hose, she turned to meet the man as he reached the new picket fence that replaced the chicken wire around the garden. He introduced himself as Frank Pierce, visiting from Connecticut. He wanted native tomatoes to put on his salad that night, and he had heard from the man at the Ideal Spot about a small stand down the way, owned and operated by husband and wife.

"No tomatoes worth eating quite yet. Maybe in a week or two," she said.

"What a shame! Would you or your husband know of any local stand that might have some red and ripe?" He asked.

"I don't know of any locals open this early. Like I said, in a week or two, maybe, but not yet." She opened the hose again and looked back to the healthy, green beginnings.

"What about your husband?"

"Oh, he's gone. Won't be back for awhile, I suspect." She did not turn around to give this answer, kept her eyes to the garden.

"Well, thank you. Perhaps I'll see you later in the season," he said as he backed towards his car. He noticed a shock of grey hair that fluttered separate from the brown, which was pinned down tightly. This length of hair waved him a mocking goodbye.

It was a successful summer that followed. Marion made time to sand the paint off the stand, which had been blistering and peeling badly, and rejuvenate it with a fresh coat of Tom Sawyer white. The white ended up attracting more tourists and regulars than the colors of the produce, which, by the nature and purpose of the stand, were kept in the shade. She had much less time to cut grape vines, let alone weave them into wreaths or baskets, but she did manage a few. Financially, the stand had one of its best seasons in thirty years of existence. And Marion found herself smiling more often than she ever had with Will. Hearing that her husband was gone, local teenagers asked if they could help with harvesting or weeding or sales, but she refused help. This was her garden now, and these were her tasks. The green months blurred by.

Frank Pierce came by again in early October, and Marion remembered his name. She always remembered the first customer of the season.

"Ah, Mr. Pierce, we do have some tomatoes for you now. They are a bit mealy because it's so late, you understand, but they're certainly edible," she said.

He noticed the life that had returned to her eyes. They had gone from

flat mud he had seen in March to this sparkling, vital brown, deep and sweet. She had even trimmed the grey out of her hair. It had been a good summer, then.

"No thank you, Mrs. Prestwick, I have had my fill of tomatoes. I would like to talk with you about your husband," he said.

"Oh," she said. Still in the garden, she held to the picket gate. "Let's go inside then, if you'd like to talk."

The kitchen smelled of bacon frying. Marion lifted the cast iron pan off the stove, hot grease spattering over her bare forearm. Using the plaid scarf, she wiped it off as if it were tepid water while holding the skillet in her other hand, handle wrapped in part of her skirt.

"Would you care for some breakfast, Mr. Pierce?"

"Maybe a slice of bacon, but that's it," he said.

She picked a piece of bacon out of the hot grease with her fingers and laid it on the plate in front of Pierce, the first man she had made breakfast for since Will. And breakfast had been the last meal, she thought.

"I was sent here by your husband's mother, Mrs. Prestwick. As you know, that woman is accustomed to a monthly call from her son. She has tried to call here, but it seems your phone is disconnected."

"She is a strange woman," said Marion, who put the pan on the stove, keeping her back to Pierce.

"Yes, strange enough to wonder where her son is after a spring and summer of no word from him," said Pierce.

"I suppose," Marion now turned to the table with lost eyes, unsure if what she had just said made any sense at all.

"What exactly did you plant in your garden when the ground thawed last spring, Mrs. Prestwick?" asked Pierce, now chewing on the bacon.

She melted into her chair while the grease dripped onto the plate in front of Pierce. Soon, she would have to betray the plaid scarf and the tight black frying pan and the tight picket fence she had built by herself to keep the wild dogs and raccoons out. But it had been a wonderful, fruitful summer with no sermons and no not-so-secret dreams, and she had done it all by herself, which is something Will never believed could happen. No, he wouldn't let her weed or till because he had to do most of the work. After all, he was the man.

"Why don't you show me what you planted?" asked Pierce, now finished with his bacon.

Smiling weakly as she thought of her husband's words, Marion did not bring her hoe, only her hands. Naked, she returned to the garden to take from the earth.

Sally Rosen

Aging

For the late N.R. Smith
of Orangeburg, S.C.

I.

I was the only child who would go,
Who needed that wet heat like food—
Rolling down the window in Mama's station wagon
I swallowed with eagerness the damp dust on the roads to
Your house, swallowed
Up the towns with names like
Camden, MacBee, Troy—towns with
Porchswings that scraped the thick air
On Main Street—standing like
Warm statues between me and the old house.
It's been years but I can see it, looming out
Through the green, towering over visions of all other houses,
Though this time it is different,
There is some aging unaccounted for.
Still, it's the same white except where shutters cracked--
Like your eyes worn
With age, with welcome and with promise
That had turned to something else.

II.

What did I mean to a house that old—me, the youngest of your
Nieces and nephews, last in the pictures lined
On the marble table top. Young enough to love
You then in the rubble of T.V. dinner tins and newspapers
Stacked up against the legs of those oak chairs,
Too young to remember the dust swept clean
Or your mother whose perfume still hung over you, still weighed
On the heavy maroon rug. Young enough, my mother
Told me later, not to fear
The high brown stairs and crumbling air and the
Man whose pain even she feared, to love fearlessly
What she couldn't approach alone.

III.

I was the child you had known once before, attentive to
Stories of soldiers and neighbors who did so well, moved on;
I was high-cheeked and snub-nosed, like your youngest sister—
The one with so many kids, no husband
And a double-wide in New Orleans—
The one you had watched wander,
Pony-tailed, through fresh fields while you took
Picture after picture. I remember examining
Your stamps, dried leaves
With my small hands, remember
Your face overcome with gentleness,
Your right index finger twitching for the camera
That had broken and never got fixed.

IV.

There was night, slowed under the weight of the long drive down,
The old clocks that rattled through the
Dense air. Drummed into a daze at your feet, I watched
You speak to my mother, discard her words—
Her sharp glances, quick questions, the way you
Reached to lift an old photograph
While she wiped her damp hair back, wondered
If you heard her at all. And then her anger turned to me—the demand
That I leave the soft heat beside you, her hand
Reaching down to carry me wailing up those stairs, sail
Me up the stairs so steep I wasn't allowed to climb them—
Swept screaming past the pendulums that rocked beyond
You there on the couch. You plummeted below me, searching
For my wild eyes as they flew past the bannister. Helpless, you
Muttered to her, maybe
I should stay up, couldn't hurt, another hour.

V.

Next morning lit the dust over Mama's careful
Packages, prepared systematically for home.
You moved slowly across the bedroom floor,
Carrying photographs for me to take, pictures of my aunt alone
watching her
Hands—older than I was then,
Older than I ever thought I'd be. One last trip
To the car stacked with your books
And the odds and ends she didn't think you'd care for anymore
And I was pulled from your embrace—
Then waving panic from the back window
(the photograph of my future blurred between my fingers)
As you stood there, in stillness, no
Soft motherly figure behind you, no
Ambitious wind pressing you forwards or back, nothing
But a fierce bush, some Spanish moss sprawled over the Oak.
The house got smaller than I thought it could get, you
Got smaller and the green hands of the yard
Closed over you.
We picked a song and looked ahead for the
Names of towns that would take us back—
If we could get there.

VI.

But this time it is different, there is some aging
Unaccounted for. This time I will stand my ground. No foreign hand
Can swing down and sweep me away, no longer
Can some voice call to me
From the mothering walls to push me on
To some wasteful, rotting sleep—
I will rest on this couch
Beside you, hear those stories that sow the child in me
Through fields of my mother; harsh storms, world war,
Those tales of smart men you knew you could have been.
I will sit with you and never
Vanish past that porch, up those high stairs.
I will sit here
On this couch. I will not leave you again.

Sally Rosen

Falling

You don't seem to feel the scratch of Autumn hiss
As we toss our steps to the red slate, toss
These comments to the frost. I feel the air itch
Somewhere in front of me, close each fist
Against it so. The wind has strength beyond the
Sound *Winter* that we rub idly with our fingers
Like a stone, beyond the glassy smell of snow
That we turn over in our voices as if it's
Something we have known
So intimately, so close.
It has power beyond the season's ache
That slides up into space, emptied out
By the rusty hum of fall.
It is new and imminent, these trees could move
Into fresh age as they press your hand
To my back, these trees could move me
Towards you. But your mind is fixed to systems, closed
To the sense I have of falling
Into each step, hurled forward by the chill.
You greet the cold with certainty, blind to the bright edge looming
Past the white return, insist that you expect it. But it could move
Me, I'm not held in place
By calenders or postulates, not solved so easily. I pace
A little faster through the wind that tries to rush me past
The rules of advance and return—
Thankful that you can't offer me something solid
To fight this falling,
That you can't feel the scratch of Autumn air
That curls beyond us
Because in your path of perfect circles
You don't know what's waiting there.

Contributors' Notes

J. Pablo Cappello is waiting for Evel Knievel to make a comeback.

Michael Carroll says FREE JAMES BROWN.

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Noeha Coutry has very kinky hair. She also loves fencing, drumming and playing foosball late at night.

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Christopher Henrikson is a senior English major with visions of ozone annihilation and bacon babies.

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Jodi-Beth McCain enjoys blowing bubbles, reading Winnie-the-Pooh, swinging on the porch swing and listening to unheard voices.

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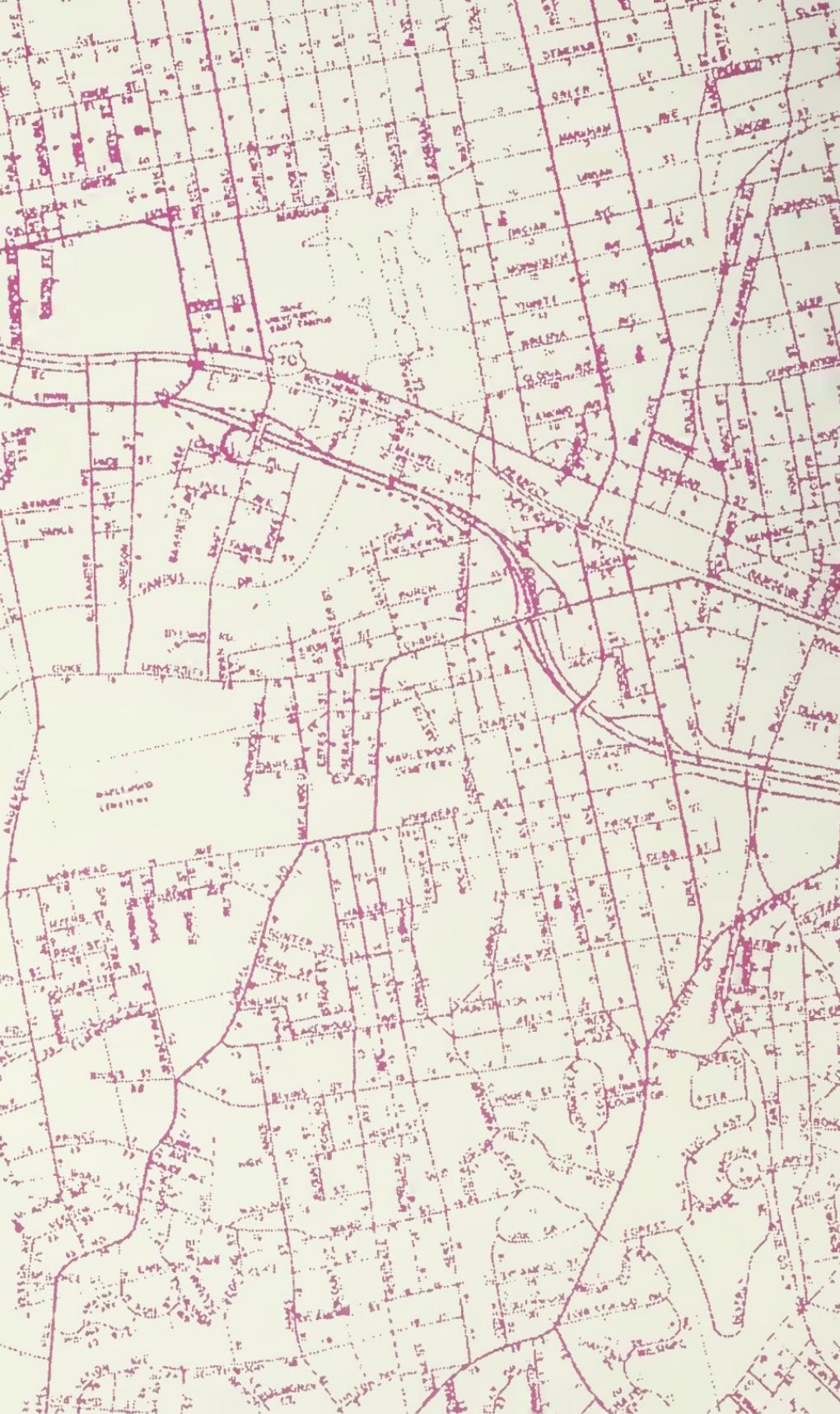
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Kathleen Wilson wants to dedicate her poems to her soulmate and close friend Jodi-Beth McCain.

Joe Witt is a Theatre major from Michigan. The monologue was conceived in a laundry mat, somewhere between the soak and spin cycle.





A R C H I V E

THE ARCHIVE

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The Archive

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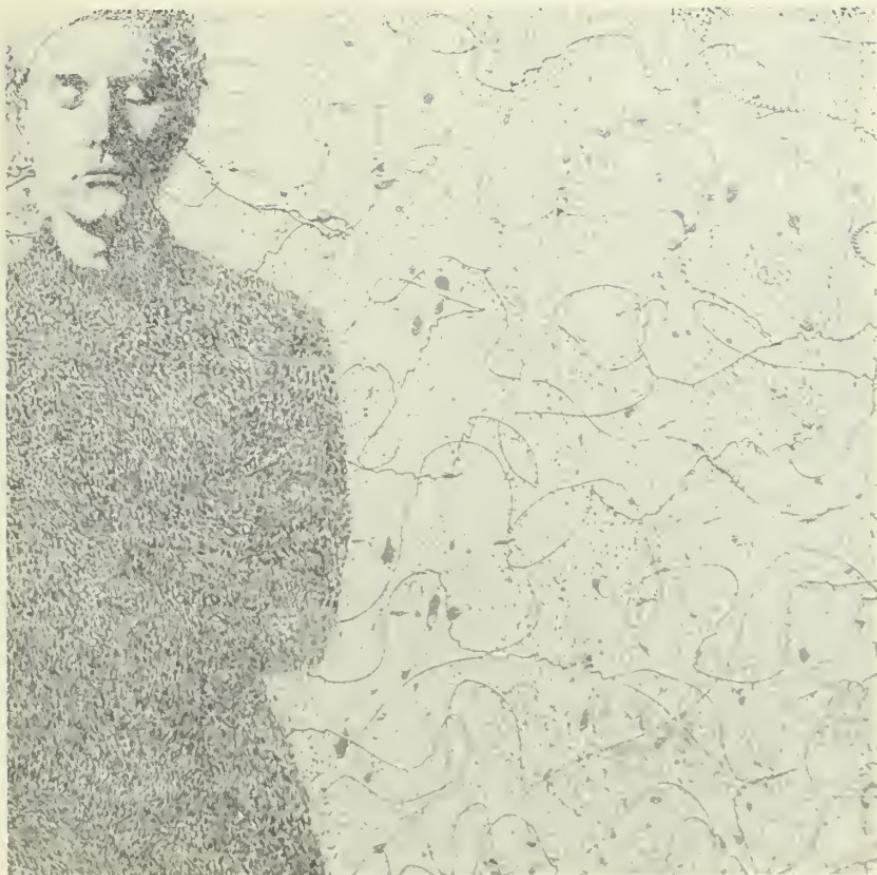
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Laura Paresky



Laura Carter

Turning

It was
a season
of blond dogs
in dappled sunlight
running
across shaggy grass
while cries of men
echoed
between the pines—
a time
for tiny webs
strung among weeds
glinting
next to your eyes
as
red-brown leaves
sailed in
from the sky
landing
bittersweet
in tree-trunk shadows.

Laura Carter

Concerto

Right in the middle
of rinsing dishes

I stop
to watch
today

my slice of summer
is blending into fall

blurry from the fuzzy dandelions
I blew away in one breath
 skipping on the brick walk
My steps beat down
four-quarter time
into the steaming
flower-filled nights

A melody lingers

Tomorrow pours out
from a glass in my hands
and I feel
the cadence change.

Laura Carter

Untitled

At the gray dawn
she stretches
abruptly
out of bed

In this old house
the pipes rattle awake
and the windows
screech to their senses
She shuts the door
silently
silently
so he won't hear

If she's ever brave
enough
to trust herself
she'll step down
from tiptoe
and yank open the curtains
to let morning flash in

But for now...

Well, the room needs dusting—
Best keep prying eyes at bay
So she leaves them closed—
a silken disguise

The sanctity of
the dingy dark
lets the spiders
in the corners
sleep

Jeanne M. Favazzo

Driving

Drive me home on the highway
And I will stretch out my legs
And listen to how people pass
On a night with no stars.

Their lights and their tires' tracks
Reach from behind to far ahead
And the air they displace rolls in waves
Beyond the shoulder and the median strip.

This feeling is low, level, lingering,
Like the cigarette smoke that ascends from my lungs
And the tears that roll down past my chin.

Tell me.
Are we there yet?

Rob Odom

Come September

I got her a perfect two dollar rose to be romantic. She asked me what I had hidden behind my back. "A carburetor," I said, and she nodded without really thinking. I was grinning at the way her dress hung loose from the shoulder down to her belted waist. "I like your dress," I said and did my best to leer. Her eyes widened, and she shook her head a little. I saw the hard white line of her teeth behind her parted lips, and I thought that she might shout. So I held it out to her then, let it lie in my hands like the line between us, so she could see how the bloom, a tight pale coil atop the firm green stem, was new and faintly sour. I thought I saw her smile.

"I'm glad you told me," she says, maybe to get my attention. She is tearing the roll apart in her hands. The rose lies forgotten on the table between us in the basket beside the bread. I might point out to her that she is making a mess, kneading this roll in her hands, but she's left her mouth partway open, and I'm waiting for what she will say. I see the waitress has crept up beside us without even a rustle out of her high puffed skirt. I wait a moment, let the girl politely clear her throat, and begin to order the salmon for us both. Then my wife stops me. Her hand lifts off the table and taps the air gently so I will see.

"No," she says. She's frowning though I doubt she knows it. She nods her head to tell me she's sure. "We're not ready just yet, thank you." She says this last to the waitress, but she's looking at me. She doesn't realize she's being rude. The waitress suggests she might bring some more bread, and she agrees, a little embarrassed, I imagine, of the roll lying still and crumpled in her plate.

"Drinks then," I say, half thinking to save her. The waitress suggests something tropical, and I order two, a little stronger, I think, than my wife had wanted. She starts to say something as the waitress leaves, but I stop her. "You want to talk," I tell her, because I understand. "You want to talk this out, but let me say that it's over now, and it was nothing, and there's no need." I say it slow and firm because I believe it, and I want her to know I understand.

She is quiet. She's got this look on her face that I've seen before. She looked like this when that retail woman added up the things she'd gotten on sale, and it came up wrong. I'm going to remind her about it, but she's shaking her head. "I don't want to talk." She's looking at

me so I can see that her eyes are red and sore.

"You are right, of course." I'm smiling because I want us to be happy. "There's no need, really. I just didn't want to hide it from you." She's not looking at me directly anymore, but at something over my shoulder. She's looking at it like it's something important, and I'm studying her face so that I won't turn. "You know that I won't see her again." Her cheeks are too full. She didn't wear any lipstick, so her mouth is pale. She's got her hair tied back with a black scarf I got her one birthday. "By telling you now, I have put this to an end."

"I told you that I didn't want to talk." I am silent for her sake, though I could say more. It's better that we not talk, I'm thinking. A day or so, and it will be over. Another night, and it will be done. I think I've spotted the couple she's been watching over my shoulder. A man and a woman who remind me vaguely of my parents. They are very old, and they eat without speaking. They've lived together so long they've said everything they ever had to say to each other. Now there's no need to talk. There are smells, and there are touches, and that is enough.

I smile and offer her again the rose, running my fingers along its stem.

"Do you remember . . ." she says it very softly. She's not sure I ought to hear. She wants me to look her in the eye, though. She wants me to see that she is calm. "Do you remember the summer after we were first together, that day we went down by the lake near my father's house?"

I remember her hair, full and loose against the grass, her bare skin smooth and cool, and her pale feet among leaves speckled yellow and brown, like lizard skins.

I nod.

"Do you remember what I said to you?" She has said it quiet like the rest, but her voice is firm. She sees that I don't understand, and she telling me. "I said that if you ever did this to me, I would leave you. I told you that I would rather live alone than live like this."

And it was going to be all right. It was going to be okay. I'm watching her. She's got the roll between her fingers. A dark clump of hair has gotten loose from her scarf and is hanging long in her face. There is a lead weight hanging from the seat of my chair through the floor so heavy it cannot even swing. "What are you saying?"

"I meant it. I think I could have done it then." She drops the roll between us onto her round white plate. It lies there without moving, brown and twisted. "I'm not leaving you, David." She's looking at the roll. "It's just that I didn't want us ever to be like this."

She's shaking her head. I see her swallow. Then she's creasing the tablecloth with her fingers along its edge. "God, please, I didn't want this to happen to us."

It didn't happen, I want to tell her. I've told you so now it's over. I'm done with this. I'll take her to her father's house come September. We'll go down to the lake together. I'll lie her down in the grass and hold her.

"Take us home now," she says, but she won't look at me. It'll come, though. We'll start again like it never happened. I drop some money on the table, though the drinks never came. I circle around and help her out of her chair. The old couple sees us leaving I think. The woman looks our way and smiles.

Bryan Morgan

So You Said

"That scent of familiarity," she began but broke off—
she spied the bird from her car, realized just where
she had seen it before...
it was not new, no.

This is her story:
Like all the doubts we at times express,
the bird had returned to explain something.
She wasn't sure—exactly—what the thing was, but
she felt that she was pretty much obligated to listen
(as we all feel at various times).

This is her song:
Birds lead to death, cars to death,
it all leads to death, she realized...
she took the car and the bird,
stuck them very close together
and began to chew. Blood,
metal, bone are so very...
tasty after a hard day's thought.

This is her praise rendered all the day long:
Later, after we all saw how she had changed, we realized (much like she had) that she had discovered the thing
Moms didn't like to mention—niceties are non...
well, enough said. Thank you, dearest Paula, for your winning performance and stunning good looks.

Nick Sholley



Nick Sholley



Senga Carroll

Sleeping Alone

Ten different women
walk through your dreams.
You go to bed early
to see them sooner.
They are all her,
have her stone-dark eyes,
her brown curls
dusted with light.
They stand
in a circle around you.
You reach for them,
pull their hips down to taste
their salty necks.
They cup your face
in all their hands,
smooth your hair,
whisper to you.
When they speak,
their eyes burn green
so you want to cry out,
and when they go
there is nothing
but a wind
thrumming, singing,
washing, leaving.

Senga Carroll

White Noise

The night trees knot their arms together in peace.
The black sink of the porch
claims spilled light.
Bamboo flourishes out back;
I place thick, green shoots
in every room,
think aloud:
I don't hear you.

This morning's sky shocks
with its clear, high blue.
The screen door creaks in code.
Birds chant in the yard.
The stupid barking of the dog next door
is a prophecy.
I sit sun stunned in a deck chair,
listen carefully, make notes.
Words, weird mantras,
wait behind every ordinary thing:
the table, red as strength,
my own heart, raked clean.

Chris Andre

The Problem with Poetry

The tentacles were growing out of the side-walks, pushing their great shining masses into the writhing air, devouring the hazy blue sky as they spiralled ever higher, waving and snapping in the wind like an inverted forest of mirrored space-suits hung out to dry. Schools of blue anenomes and sea-cucumbers, as well as other large blobs of gelatinous matter, languidly shuffled about as the shock impulses from the poisoned tentacles crashed through the streets. Bill could almost imagine the monstrous head of the octopus as it came to feast on his body: a towering hood of dark, rubbery flesh; eyes crimson, pupil-less, and burning with lustful hatred; beak snapping and crunching, almost drolling sewer-slime; tentacles flailing more and more as the ferocious beast sensed the tender morsel of flesh waiting on the street-corner. Bill crouched slightly in fear, protecting his new silk tie so that it might be consumed last of all. In the corner of his eye, he caught a peripheral glimpse of the tentacle nearest him. It had moved so menacingly close that he could actually see details of the creature's shimmering black flesh; there appeared to be silver letters near the base of the amazingly large arm. "First National Bank of New York," they said.

Bill straightened up slightly, and looked around. The shock waves had receded, and the anenomes were solidifying into crowds of bankers. 'Which is more terrifying?' Bill wondered to himself, but then shifted his attention to orienting himself in this confusing new setting. He checked a black book in his breast-pocket, and found that he was almost late for a lunch appointment. He scurried down the side-walk, still feeling slightly menaced by the petrified tentacles towering over his head. Passing a street-level window, yellow with a film of grime and age, he was forced to stop. He knew, he knew that this was a bar, and yet through the ancient amber (strangely back-lit for the duration of his visit) he saw the formation of the Universe: the primal particle of matter was just emerging from a seething orange pool of undiluted chaotic energy, and suggestions of willfully meaningful fissures were cracked into the subtly heavy space of the bar. The customers were translucent, future echoes of the arrival of Universal consciousness, the heralds of meaning for time immemorial. Bill realized all of this in an instant, which was lucky because he was already late for lunch.

Once inside the elevator, Bill ascended a major vein until he reached the heart, stopped to let on some corpuscles rushing to a fever blister, and then continued up through one of the carotid arteries (he was unsure which one). Emerging into the sunlight of the roof-top restaurant, he quickly found his proper table and began to exhale long, (uncooked) spaghetti-like strings of words at the person across from him. Bill thought this ironic since he had ordered linguini primavera. He amused himself by seeing how long he could stretch a piece of syntactic spaghetti before it broke. The person across the table thought Bill was talking about the Mets. When the other man turned around to call for the check, Bill noticed a pair of grayish stubs just where the man's shoulder-blades should have been. Bill looked around and noticed the same stubs, in varying hues and sizes, on the backs of the other customers in the restaurant. He then attempted to look at his own shoulders, and thought he saw a faint effervescence, a shimmering of ephemeral sunlight on parti-colored wings which stretched to infinity through the sky behind him. He stood up, said to the man, 'You get the check; I've got to be free,' and ran to the edge of the roof. Looking down, into the magical valley of shining mushroomis and glowing trees, with the silver hawks streaking overhead and the fuzzy yellow rabbits hopping below, Bill thought: 'This is my home, where I will be free to do as I please.' Sailing through the air, Bill realized that he was also free to plummet like a stone. Not a magic stone, or a lump of plasm energy, but rather a basically inert lodestone carrying a slight charge of awareness. And after he hit, he didn't even have that anymore.

Tara Shoemaker

Birds She Wished Could Fly

I In a hug, shoulder to cheek, a brush of his
lips on her neck finally breaks her autumn skin,
engraves words into her throat— she needs
to call out questions. Instead she weeps
through raw slices, new gills fluttering

II His hair blows over
angry shades in his face,
hands on fire.

This is not about something nice.

This is groping on gravel
by a tepid lake
by accident.

III This is a strange
thrilling in the bones. Dark moths
shrill on the spine, stalk her for later.
Crossfire of moonlight creeps in under one shade
then escapes out the other, slick
with kisses and sweat.

In the habit of passion, night runs out,
leaves her suspended, caught like an owl
in a searchlight—the morning sun
sneaks in the east window,
heats up her fear, terror,
panic washing
her awake
years have become
a mother cat with a cruel tongue
awake, awake

IV Delicate scalpels
define veins, cells,
perforate layers
for examination for
exploration. Carving
fine scrim from edges
looking for pain
to see whose face appears
solemn over hers in the dark

Tara Shoemaker

Leaving Early

I located him over by the punch bowl eating the lemons. "Mango," I said, "I just can't deal with this any more, would you mind if we..."

He looked around the room and licked his lips. "No, that's cool, come on." We wove our way around the conversations and smiled apologetically to people we didn't know. Yes, we're leaving so soon, we just had the greatest time, drop by sometime, okay? Finally, the foyer, then the street. "Do you want to wait here? I had to park clear around the next block."

I shook my head.

"It's raining, Amy."

"No kidding." The drizzle tasted good against my teeth after the smoke and nachos. I put my hand through his arm and into the pocket of his long coat. He slid his hand in around mine and we started towards Greene Street. My socks were damp before he finally asked.

I shrugged. "Just Steve, that's all."

"Steve's a dick. You know that."

Across the alley I could see into an apartment on the third floor. A woman tilted over a table was scrubbing in huge circles, quickly, without scowling. Only a nurse has that kind of efficiency, I thought. My mother won't be able to do it. She'll sit weakly in the stiff chair by his bed forever. Just the way she does now, tracing every lump under the street with her eyes, praying for a twitch somewhere.

"I know," I said to the lamppost. Mango sniffed.

"So?"

"So I pictured him without his God-wonderful body. I put all his trophies on a shelf above his bed and pictured him stretching his chin to try to look at them."

"Be good for his ego."

"Shut up, Mango." The rain was starting to fill up my lungs now. I could feel the mist settling in my chest, aching as I tried to breathe. "It could have been worse, he just sold insurance, you know?"

"Sells insurance."

"Yeah, right."

This town still seems weird at night, no matter how many times I see it this way. It's like the quiet spills out of Mango's other pocket, because there isn't enough darkness to fill up the streets. The pocket I put my

hand in always has a few good words floating around. If I don't hang on to them he loses them, so I keep talking about not going back to school, so I can help Mom. And then I say, "Mango, you never could parallel park."

He holds onto the side of my head and kisses me. I can tell by his eyebrows that he is trying to decide if I am crying or if it's just the drizzle condensing on my face. He just stands like that, a small drop of water running down his forehead into the hair by his ear. "Do you want to go home, or what? Will you be okay?"

"Yeah, I bet Mom is still up."

He nodded. The defroster doesn't work very well in Mango's car so he drove slowly, trying to figure out what was in the road ahead of us. I wondered if he ever thought of selling insurance. The light was on upstairs when we pulled in to the driveway, but I went into the kitchen instead, rolling up my sleeves. The table was still covered with dry crumbs and dishes.

Laurie Goldman

Reflections on My Needs and Desires While Watching the 6 O'Clock News

I want something
big.

I want to look tough
and strong.

It must be brand new
and shiny.

If it is dirty
it isn't as good
and then I would want
a different one.

If anyone else had one like mine
or

if mine becomes outdated
I will also want
a different one.

But it must be big.

Bigger
than my old one.

Bigger
than his
and of course it must be
better.

That should go without saying.

I don't really care
what it is
as long as it is big.

Laurie Goldman



Tom Ivey

His Muse Being Callipygia

"You see, here we have the fruity categories
which the English seem to prefer:
the apple, the peach, the Victoria plum,
nectarine, Jerusalem cherry, and a perfect pear.
But these are mere shapes,
Without tension or movement; they leave out
The swing of the hips, subtle or strident.
They cannot hope to describe
The moment of unobserved observation
When one cannot stop and cannot breathe
Unable to cause or prevent the evaporation
Of an instant divine."

He closed the album with liverspotted hands
Then we went down for cognac.

Tom Ivey

letter to my father

like a gathering river memory's tide disorders all and yet
gives new order, unforeseen angles in a random fall of yellow
leaves;

and when we fall from the air frightening footprints may emerge
on the land— there could have been giants, once;
just as to a child, each tree a forest, next week forever,
we catch ourselves explaining things we never believed either,
so we in rooms discreetly shut and among friends may rise
and say things we no longer believe

"I don't believe the earth is a place of shit and clorox bottles,
or a vale of tears;
I don't believe that god is a christian
and hell is a fiction;
and I don't believe that my father is dead, but that
he's in cahoots with the aliens, observing me from that UFO
high up on my left, and muttering well-I'll-be-damned."

if we tear up a photograph seventeen times and it falls to the floor
looking like someone else and yet the same
it has to be clear to us that this is the time, this is the place;
this is why these hands are the same and yet not,
this face, this old man's stare;
and as we sit in cosy rooms discreetly shut among friends,
the worm turns and turns again among the yellow leaves

John Lawton



Kellee Kaplan

Goodnight

When I come home late at night,
I see the light from under their bedroom door.
Mom and Francis are asleep in the bed
my parents made me in and slept in
for thirteen years
under the wedding picture
no longer on the wall.

Francis lies fully dressed
where he collapsed
after washing the dinner dishes,
too tired to take off even his shoes.
If I tried to wake him,
he'd gurgle like a baby
and turn on his stomach in protest.
I'd have his sweater halfway over his head
before he'd realize who I was.

Mom dozed off while working,
papers scattered by a breeze
that slipped in as she slept,
her head propped up on pillows
covered by black curls
laced with gray
she no longer bothers to pull out.
Reading glasses balance
on the bridge of her crooked nose,
broken when she fell down the stairs,
protecting me,
curled in her stomach.

The television is blaring,
despite my repeated warnings
about infiltration of the unconscious.
I'd switch it off, but the silence always wakes them.
I tuck them in and kiss them goodnight.

Jon Humphreys

Just Before the Return to Prohibition

Up at the bar, Mike ordered two scotch and sodas. He told the bartender to put about a finger in each and watched him measure out the scotch from the decanter into the glasses. A drink in each hand, he went over to a small round table at the back of the cafe.

"There's only about a finger in each," he said. "I didn't want you getting sick."

Elaine, the girl he was sitting with, took her drink. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean I don't want you getting sick."

"I'm not sick," she said. "I feel wonderful."

"Well, you'll feel like hell if you keep this up."

Elaine tasted her drink. "You're just piqued," she said. "You're piqued and you don't want to admit it."

Mike said nothing. He and Elaine had been waiting in the cafe for more than an hour. Elaine was supposed to meet her fiance for dinner, and Mike had wanted to wait with her until he arrived. Now he was tired of waiting and wished they could leave.

Elaine was looking at her teeth in the compact mirror she carried in her purse. She ran her tongue between her upper lip and teeth. When she put away the mirror, Mike looked out the plate glass window at the front of the cafe. Through it, he could see the masts of the two-and-three-men boats tied to the docks. They bobbed up and down in the waves and their masts stood out dark against the fading color in the sky.

"He should've been here by now," said Mike. "You want to call him?"

"Not yet," said Elaine.

"Maybe he got tied up. Maybe he can't make it. Didn't you say he was going over to Dole's office?"

"That was Byrd's. He'll be here soon. He's always late."

"Maybe the session ran over."

"Maybe so." Elaine reached across the table. She picked up Mike's hat and put it crookedly on her head. It was the felt kind with a narrow brim, and with it, Mike thought she looked much older.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"I think you're drunk."

"No. Really. What do you think? Does it really look awful on me?"

"You look great," he said. "How many have you had? Three? Four?"

"I don't know. Get me another one."

"You get it yourself."

Elaine took off the hat. She wore her hair short like a young boy and as she bent over she had to brush it back from her face. "You're just piqued," she said. "I wish they'd play something."

"What?" said Mike. The noise from the bar made it difficult to hear.

"I said I wish they'd play something. So we could dance."

"Not now. You said you're dancing later on."

"That doesn't matter. Come on."

"Save it. You'll be too tired."

"No. Come on. Let's dance."

"Not now." Mike sat back in his chair. He watched a young man and a girl in a herringbone coat come into the cafe. They were laughing very loudly, and as they came in, he recognized them as Henry and Pauline.

"Salut! Salut!" said Henry when he was close enough to be heard. "Ca va? Save something for us!" He spoke to Pauline. "I told you they'd be knocked."

"Sit down," said Elaine. "How'd you find us?"

Henry stood beside their table. "How'd we find you?" He looked at Pauline. "How'd we find them?"

"We ran into your fiance," she said.

"He said you were inside and so we came in," said Henry. "So here we are."

Elaine put down her glass. "He's outside?" she asked.

"Of course. Where else would he be?"

"He's in the car," said Pauline.

"Right. Yeah. Outside in the car."

"When did he get here?" asked Elaine.

"Oh, I don't know," said Henry. "He's in the parking lot. He said he didn't want to leave it. The car, I mean." Henry sat down and picked up Mike's glass. "Scotch?" he said. "We'll see about that."

Elaine got her coat. It was made of blue wool and she put it on without buttoning it. "I'd better go," she said. "I'm really sorry. Leaving like this."

"I told you she'd be knocked," said Henry. He and Pauline laughed.

Elaine picked up Mike's hat from the table and put it squarely on her head. She looked for her purse, found it, and said goodbye.

As she walked to the door, Mike held his glass and watched her. At first he watched her in profile and saw her slightly too large nose and slightly too small mouth and slightly too thin chest through the opening in her coat. Then he watched her from behind and saw her hair light on the top and dark near her skin and soft near the nape of her neck. He saw her legs pale through the white stockings and her neck white against her coat. Then he stopped looking.

A waiter had come to take their orders and Henry was ordering. "It's what all the Romans drank," he said. "Caesar and all the Romans. One for her, too."

Mike looked back at the front of the cafe. Through the window he could see Elaine just rounding the corner, and as she disappeared he saw the tail of her coat and the foot of her right stocking.

The waiter spoke to him. "What about you?" he asked.

Mike picked up his glass and set it down again. It was empty and he turned to the waiter. "Me, too," he said. "Me, too. The same for me."

Their drinks came at five minutes past eight. Henry had just finished the story of his two weeks in Greece when the waiter set them on the table. After taking her glass, Pauline reached into her coat and produced a small plastic bottle.

"It's her water," said Henry. "She adds it to everything."

"It's Evian water," she explained. "It's mineral water. From France."

"She'll add it to anything. Drinks, coffee, milk, tea. You wouldn't believe it. And she thinks it's good for her."

Pauline added about a finger of the water to her gin and tonic. "It's true. It really is good for you. It's got lots of minerals and vitamins. Did you know your body only absorbs one-tenth of the iron you eat?"

Henry laughed. "She read somewhere how iron's supposed to boost your sex drive. Can you believe her?"

Pauline leaned out over the table. "I'm serious. And you should hear what I've read about alcohol. From what I've read, I wouldn't be surprised if in a couple of years nobody'll touch the stuff."

"Can you believe her?"

Mike looked from Pauline to Henry and then back to Pauline. He ran his finger around the rim of his glass.

"I'm serious," said Pauline. "It's true. I bet in a couple of years nobody'll even touch the stuff. I bet in a couple of years they'll even bring back prohibition."

Henry laughed. "Can you believe her?" Pauline was quiet and Henry finished off the rest of his gin. "You decide where you're going yet? After the wedding, I mean."

"Oh I don't know," said Mike. "I haven't really thought about it."

"We were kind of hoping you'd come with us. Up to Cape Cod. My parents lent me the house and we wanted to get some people together."

"I don't know," said Mike.

"It'd be for at least a week. We'd have the whole place. The lake and everything. What do you say?"

"You can't miss it," said Pauline. "You really can't."

"She's right. It'll be great. We'll have the whole place to ourselves." Henry reached down to get his empty glass. When he looked up again, that was when it happened. The skin on his face had drawn up until it was taut around his eyes and cheeks and mouth. His eyes had sunk back in their sockets and looked dead behind the little round glasses. His lips were drawn tight against his teeth and all the color had gone out of his face so that it was the color of sour milk.

"Are you okay?" said Mike.

Henry said nothing and looked at his empty glass.

"Is he okay?"

Pauline laughed. "Doesn't he look horrible?"

"He looks like he's dying. We'd better get him to a doctor."

Pauline laughed again. "No no no. He'll be fine. He always gets this way when he's knocked."

"Shouldn't he at least get some air?"

"Oh, he'll be fine. Give him a few minutes. It's really nothing."

Mike stood up. "Come on," he said. "I think he should get some air." He picked up Henry's coat. Pauline protested and then got her own. Henry was silent as they lifted him out of his chair and helped him to the door.

It was dark and cloudy on the docks in front of the cafe. A light breeze came off the bay, rocking the boats that were tied to the side. Mike sat Henry against a post about halfway down the dock. His color had returned but he refused to stand up.

"You really should come with us," said Pauline. They walked the ten yards to the edge of the dock and stopped among the little blue halogen lights.

"I'd like to," said Mike. "I really would."

"We could pick you up right afterwards. If you want, you can meet us at the reception."

"I don't know."

"What do you mean?" said Pauline. She stood with her right foot perpendicular to her left one.

"It just wouldn't feel right. Showing up at the reception."

"I'm sure nobody'd mind. I mean after everything's over with."

Mike looked at the water. A strong breeze came off the bay and Pauline folded her arms across her chest. She hunched her shoulders so the collar of her coat covered her neck. Her hair fell down her face to her cheek and she brushed it back. "Really," she said. "I'm sure it was a mistake. The whole thing must've been a mistake."

"I don't know," said Mike.

"It must've been. You know how things get lost. You should talk to her. I'm sure it wouldn't be a problem."

"I'll think about it."

"You really should."

"I know." Mike stopped looking at the water. Henry had risen to a standing position and was half-limping, half-walking to where they stood. His face was puffy and his eyes had risen out of their sockets.

"You look better," said Mike.

"I think I'm dying."

"Oh stop it," said Pauline. "You'll be fine. You're just knocked."

"No, really. I think I'm dying. Feel my forehead."

"You're not dying. You look fine."

Henry took two or three steps toward Pauline. "Here. Feel my forehead. I think I've got a fever."

"Stop it. You don't have a fever." Pauline put her hand on his forehead. "See? You feel fine."

"You'd better get a thermometer."

"He can be such a baby," said Pauline. "Especially when he's knocked. He'll do this all the way back to the apartment."

"You really think I look better?"

"Better than in the bar," said Mike.

"That's a good thing," said Henry. "That's a good thing. I've always had great recuperation power."

Pauline took Henry by the arm. "I'd better get him back," she said. "Come on."

"I'm serious," said Henry. "I really am a great recuperator. I mean I've always recuperated great."

"Come on. Let's go."

"Just a minute. You really think I look better?"

Mike said nothing. A tremendous cargo ship had sailed into

the bay and now it trawled past them on its way to the other side. Small waves beat against the docks as it passed.

"Come on," said Pauline.

"No. I think I feel better."

"You're knocked. Let's go."

"I said I feel better. How about another drink?"

"No."

"Just one. We'll bring it back."

"Stop it. Let's go."

As the cargo ship passed, it began to rain. It was a light rain and as it fell Mike thought about Elaine. He thought about her laughing but trying to keep quiet, her arm against her mouth and her laugh soft but too loud. He thought about her tortoise shell cat and their run through the rain. He thought about their seven hours asleep on the train to Boston and her arm pale in the strapless dress.

After a while it began to rain harder and he left the docks and went back into the cafe.

The door to Elaine's apartment was unlocked. It was still raining when Mike went in. A Gershwin tape played on the stereo and he shut it off.

Elaine slept with her face pressed against the back of the sofa. The room was hot and dry and Mike could hear the rain echo down the chimney. The floor sloped at an impossible angle but he steadied himself and went to the sofa.

Elaine's cheeks were flushed and her hair was tangled. Mike's hat had fallen from her head to the floor. A section of her dress had gathered around her legs and Mike could see the birthmark on her left thigh. For a long time he looked at the birthmark. Then, careful not to touch her, he pulled down the dress until it covered her thigh to her calf.

"Elaine," he said. "It's me. Wake up." His voice sounded too loud in his head.

Elaine breathed loudly. She didn't move when he spoke.

"Elaine," he said. "Wake up." He grabbed her by the back of the shoulders. She was limp and he shook her violently.

"Wake up. Hey. Listen to me."

Elaine started. "Huh? What? Whoosit?" She sat up and looked around the room.

Mike held her tightly by the shoulders. "Elaine," he said. "Listen to me. Remember that time back at Rutherford and you wore that strapless dress and I wouldn't come out of the car?"

Elaine looked up at Mike, who was practically on top of her.

"Listen to me. It wasn't such a big deal, was it?"

Courtney Smith

Afternoon

If you lie
propped
on elbows
knees bent
feet crossed
facing
the 5:30 sun
in October

and sight
along the tips
of grass
and pine needles
and autumn's
first leaves

you will see
tiny
industrious
spiders
building
perfect
end-of-the-day
webs
on a back-lighted
stage.

John Lawton



Laura Nien-Hwa Ch'ien

To Little Boy

I have envied my neighbor's dog
for all his "happiness".
Troubled, I have turned to his life,
thinking him better
off in the comparison. From my window
I look at him lying like dead
in the sunshine, body slack from
the rapturous warmth
he feels in his fur. But always, as if pricked
back to life, he jumps up
and rushes, barking,
toward the sound
of a squirrel running along a branch,
or of some child passing by.
At night I hear his cry, and I think
this must be the voice of elation
at his loneliness, and that he is lifting his head up
to greet the sky falling over his eyes and mouth
like a veil beaded with stars. But,
even then he is crying at the moon's whim,
and I feel foolish envying his happiness.

Leigh Edwards

Tick Tock

The watch sits brown and
crumpled, with its leather touching
wood, and shifting shadows
on the desk surface.

Gold clasp runs through the
deep, reaching band and the
clear face carries silver across
its back—
catches the light and distorts its
reflection, and questions what you think
time is made of.

Rubbed and worn, two metal
hands tick off their minutes,
their seconds, their units, and
move the air trapped inside
the watch face—
as if the watch's own small universe
contained everything that mattered,
and all elements
hinged on a singular movement.

It moves into your ear and
rests in your heartbeats and your
thoughts, until that small
piece of rumpled leather and
metal has taken dominion, and
its movements sound in your own.

Leigh Edwards

Rocking

Autumn air breaking down
across her hills.
Struggling to recall the best
time of day to watch the trees,
Grasping to see the
hay bins in the grayed
red barn, and to remember
where the tractor's wheels
made furrows on the dirt floor.
Looking out across the
driveway full of
pinecombs,
She sits in her chair—
feet pushing the ground,
hands turning lightly
over themselves.
Wondering how the jars
used to fit on the shelves,
lining the kitchen
with preserves—
orange depths dark through
heavy glass,
And where the voices went
that used to call up
the stairs to her
when crashing platters, pots.
Or the nighttime sound of a house
full of sleepers,
morning-waking quivers of
the yellow-brown leaves.
Rocking, her foot creaking forward,
The sun licking her temples,
On her perch she feels
the hours stumbling.

Min Wu

Sunday Morning

Room is warmed up
by a coal furnace.
A boy gets up half-sleepily,
raises curtains and looks out:

Ah!
His smiling eyes catch
a sight of white world—
cypress, chimney and the whole village
are covered with blue-white snow,
even school's brass-bell
is painted white.

From the rear courtyard,
walks out an old man,
frost resting upon his eyebrows,
who delivers briquettes door by door.
Carelessly, he treads on the snow-path,
leaves a cluster of black foot-prints
and carries coal to the neighbor's door.

The boy shuts up the curtain, cries:
"That stupid worker smears my snow!"
He's been longing all year
for the first pure snow-fall.
He sobs soundly
by the warming furnace.

Brad Rickman

Guitar

Gus had this guitar, this old, beat-up, ragged guitar with scratches on the light-blonde wood of the body and spots on the fretboard where the varnish had been worn all the way through, so that you knew it wasn't real rosewood after all; and the bridge pegs were different colors since all of them had been broken at one time or another, and they stood up at different lengths, because the wood had warped and the holes had been twisted into different sizes. The strings were always flat on this guitar, even if you had just put them on. Up at the headstock extra lengths of string curled out from the tuning pegs; they looked like those fingernails you see pictures of in the Guiness Book of World Records. If you caught them wrong they would scratch the underside of your arm where the skin is soft.

Gus had stolen the guitar from his older brother, who stole it from someone else before that. He didn't really know how to play it—Gus, I mean—not when he stole it anyway; he just showed up with it one day, like he'd had it all along, and for a while I wasn't sure that he hadn't had it all along. He took it with him everywhere, this guitar. He'd come into a room and just sit there, talking to you, playing the guitar sort of out of the side of his head, on the periphery, one hand strumming up and down on the strings and the other sliding on the fretboard, back and forth, index and ring fingers, set two frets apart and muting the rest of the strings. Nothing much in the way of music ever came out; he didn't know how to play. But it was there just the same, always, in the background, like a soundtrack.

There is a funny thing about guitars. Whenever there's one around, people want to touch it. No matter whether they know how to play it or not—if it's there they will pick it up. It was this way with Gus's guitar. He would walk into a room with it—Gus was forever walking in and out of rooms—and as he sat he'd be playing it, like always. And suddenly, before anyone really knew what was happening, the guitar had gone all the way around the room, passed from one hand to the next, everyone taking a turn touching it, strumming it for a minute or two, then giving it to the next. Everyone had to get a hand on it. And you'd never even notice that it had disappeared from Gus' lap until the person next to you was passing it your way, sticking the neck out in front of your face without a word, assuming you'd want to touch it like the rest of them—that's how peripheral this guitar was. Still, that's the

thing about them. Everyone has got to touch them if they're there.

I could play. The name on the headstock was Carlos. I had never heard of this name before. Gus told me that his brother had said that the guitar cost two hundred dollars new, with the case. I don't know how his brother knew this if he stole the guitar. It was not a question I asked. I'd been playing for about six or seven years when Gus showed up with that guitar. You wouldn't have known this by hearing me play, though. You'd have thought it was more like six months. This guitar of Gus' was easy to work, the action set real low and the neck thin so you could get a good grip and wrap your fingers all the way around. It was a good guitar to play. I don't mean you'd have wanted to give a concert with it—it was too old and beat up, too much mileage and too much sweat, to ever be made to sing. But even so it was a hell of a guitar to play. We both knew this, Gus and I; it was one of those things that you knew, and that you knew someone else knew, even though neither of you ever said it. A kind of a thing that doesn't have to be said; and you got the feeling that if you did say it, some of the power of the thing might be taken away, and it might not be as true anymore. There are a lot of things like that, more than you would ever think; but some idiot always has to go and say them and then they kind of fade a little bit and everyone can talk about them, and they do, until they're all talked out and used up, vanished.

Anyway, it was a hell of a thing to play this guitar.

They try to tell you that nicotine addiction is the main reason why people smoke. Gus and I knew that this was not true. We smoked for the smoke, the fire, heat and warm movements between your fingers and into your mouth and throat, the motion of your hands and the drift of the small cylinders from finger to finger, hand to hand, hand to mouth. It was best to smoke in the fall, cold air wrapped around you but kept away at an infinitesimal distance by the glow of the cigarette. The metallic click of Zippo lighters and a sudden flash of blue and yellow flame and the smell of Naphtha.

Once, when Günter decided to throw a party, he gave Gus and McTeague thirty-five dollars to buy decorations and booze. This was probably not a thing I would have done in his position. Gus and McTeague took the money and instead bought three cartons of Camel filterless cigarettes and arranged them in a circular pile on a silver serving tray Gus found buried in the back of his landlady's coat closet. Gus stood by the door with his tangled hair greased and pulled back in a tail and the serving tray full of filterless cigarettes resting on the palm of his right hand, sunglasses on, and offered them to the people coming

through the door.

"Legal dope," he said.

Günter flew into a rage when he came out of the kitchen and saw him there, the tray half empty and a burning cigarette dangling from his mouth. He tried to cross the floor, bellowing, waving a golf club he had picked up from the corner of the hallway at Gus's head when McTeague caught hold of him from behind and tried in a low voice to calm him down. Günter was having none of it and McTeague finally had to go out and spend twenty-five dollars of his own money on liquor, because Günter said that he could handle a party without decorations but goddamn it there had better be some booze coming from somewhere. McTeague left as Günter began to wave the club again in his direction. He bought twenty-five dollars worth of rum and vodka, drank one bottle on the way home, smashed another one on the pavement beside the driveway, and by the time he got back Günter had gotten drunk on a bottle of gin from the basement and was collapsed in a wicker chair in the room where Gus was still standing, eyes hidden behind the sunglasses, offering the tray of cigarettes and leaning with his left hand resting on the handle of Günter's golf club. The three of us, McTeague, Gus, and me, took the tray and everything that was left on it out into the November night and sat smoking on the curb under the streetlights, the moths flapping wildly around us and away again at the smell of the tobacco burning and the music from Günter's party still raging in the background, and we smoked all of the cigarettes left, every single one. I ended up smoking the most because—this was a thing with me—I could not stop to rest in between each cigarette as long as there was another one left on the tray. It was a beautiful, beautiful night and our fingers burned because we held the butts of the cigarettes until there was almost nothing left, far too long, sucking every last wisp of smoke from the ends, our teeth covered with strands of shredded tobacco. The next day I could not talk and my head ached with a pounding sensation, and for six days after that night my throat was sore and the words I said sounded as though they were passing through sandpaper.

On autumn weekends sometimes Günter, McTeague, Gus and I would drive up to a place my grandmother had on a lake in the mountains. It was a good three-hour drive and we usually left on Fridays, after noon, and took turns driving up the highways and backend roads that led to the camp. In the fall there were always powerful winds streaking across the lanes of pavement; we could feel them in the car, shaking the small frame from one lane to the other in gusts, wobbling the tires underneath us.

Günter at these times was a child of the weather, a creature of the skies and storms. He claimed he could see the winds moving and tearing all around us, colored and glowing, alive with direction and wild wanton purpose. He predicted their movements, saw them coming from a hundred yards away, told us where the next gust was coming from so that McTeague, driving the car, could speed up or slow down and let it pass either in front of or behind the car. Günter leaned far out the window, out almost to his waist, his black hair trailing behind him in a stringy lump and his eyes closed with the force of the car's speed and he screamed, great long unearthly screams that caused Gus and I to shrink over to the other side of the car, away from him and away from the winds, our skin crawling and tingling with a strange mute fear of whatever it was that connected Günter with whatever it was he was connected to, and of the mindless passion of his yelling.

The lake house was a dark place, a place of wood and shadows. There were pine trees jabbed into position on all sides. There were tall rounded mountains rising up like extensions of the walls of the lake and covered with bric-a-brac trees, orange, yellow, red, green. The water was a murky black syrup. At night Gus and I would sit on the edge of my grandmother's dock, so small that our backs rested against the steps leading down while our knees bunched up uncomfortably at the end and pulled our feet back from the water, while Günter and McTeague sat inside and drank cold dark beer from the store six miles back on the corner of the paved town road and the dirt road which led to the house, and played Gus's guitar. It moved silently between us, back and forth again and again in so natural a motion that the music, random strumming, never broke stride. We smoked cigarettes that dangled from our teeth, and the ashes hung longer and longer until finally they would fall off into the water or onto the dock beside our legs, or most of the time just into our laps, which was not so bad since by that time they had been hanging for a good while and were hardly even warm anymore. Don't ask me why this is so—autumn nights I mean—but there was never a time that we went up there, that Gus and I sat on the short dock and listened to the hills and the water, to the music from the country-and-western jubilee hall across the lake, to McTeague and Günter arguing with each other as they drank inside the walls of the house, that the sky was not large and close to us, and washed with a color of blue that was almost a glowing electric buzz, like a darkly colored neon bowl, so that the light was only hinted at, like something in the background maybe, white light behind a thick curtain of deep-blue glass, but something that was hot and glowing; or that the stars were not clearly visible and almost falling on our heads, so close

that we could see the reddish shadows they cast against the blue-black electric bowl of the sky behind them. Eventually it got so cold that we would have to go in, McTeague and Günter passed out in second-hand rocking-chairs in front of the dying fire, and put logs on the fire to burn for the night, and cover ourselves with towels from the bathroom because there were no more blankets, McTeague and Günter had taken both of them before they got drunk enough to pass out, and fall asleep to the moaning sounds of wind shooting down the slopes of the mountains and across the cold dark solid surface of the lake, sometimes loud and sometimes so faint you could only hear them in the silence.

I guess it wasn't really much of a surprise for me, the night that Günter lost it. He and McTeague were sitting in the house, as usual, drunk, as usual, arguing, as usual—huge windows went around the house on all sides but neither one of them ever looked out through them, only Gus and I looked in. It was hard to figure what they were going to argue about when the two of them would go at it; but we had gotten used to the sounds of their voices: McTeague's softer and more insistent but with an aloof untouchable quality that could drive anyone, particularly Günter, into fits of impotent rage; and Günter's, louder, furious, panic-driven and raging, cutting the steady softer voice off in the middle of sentences, cursing and spouting angrily. Günter's voice was full of an angry fear, I noticed that even from the beginning. Gus and I sat at the edge of the dock and the voices faded into the background noise of the lake that were all around us, no louder than the humming of the frogs and the crickets and the other night-things that groaned between the slight slurping of the wind-blown waves against the wooden legs of the dock, certainly no louder than the heavy silent breathing of the mountains which were darker than the night they kept out, the setting for the neon jewel of sky, and not even so loud as the line of creaking guitar-notes that swam in an unbroken back-and-forth between us.

But on this night Günter's voice began to rise and McTeague's stopped altogether. Günter was screaming at him, asking a question and pausing to wait a second or two for an answer, then going on again quickly when he didn't get it, stringing together a long line of sentences and curses which always seemed to get around to another question finally, and then the whole thing started over again. Standing on the dock with Gus I could not understand the words he was saying but I could make out the tones of his voice, the hysterical inflections, and through the large walls of glass we could see his face; he stood over McTeague and looked down at him and his face was wrenched into a grimace of rage that was so complete and so consuming that it seemed

to exclude McTeague altogether, and the burning eyes full of pain did not even see McTeague there below him—he was yelling in that direction and McTeague just happened to be there, in the way; and it looked like McTeague knew this and that was why he was keeping his mouth shut, that if he said anything it would only remind Günter that he was there and he would no longer just be in the way. Günter and McTeague were a year older than Gus and I. There was the sound of breaking glass. Beer cans which had accumulated around the feet of the chairs in which they sat flew up into the air with a loud and repeating metal rattle. We watched them through the glass. Günter went for a row of empty liquor bottles on one of the kitchen counters and there was more broken glass, chips and slivers flying into the corners of the front room of the house, some of them banging against the windows with little clicks and causing me to wince as though they might actually come through, or as though the windows weren't really there.

Günter disappeared into the darkness of a hallway in the house. Neither Gus nor I moved. When he came back there was a small black pistol in his right hand and another empty liquor bottle in his left. The pistol had been my grandfather's before he died, kept around the house to shoot at squirrels and fish and other things that were too small and quick for him to hit, and which my grandmother had buried deep in the back of one of the closets in the front hallway of the house, but the four of us had pulled out from time to time just to look at, never to shoot. It should have reminded me of my grandfather but hadn't until I saw Günter charge from out of the black space with it dangling from his fingertips. For a second I thought he might shoot McTeague, but he was still too blind in his rage and couldn't see that there was anyone else in the room with him. Which was just as well for McTeague, and he seemed to know that, too. Günter was still screaming and cursing at the top of his lungs and echoes rocked back to us from across the lake, swimming the textures of his voice in layers over us so that the words became even more indistinguishable but the tones were louder and stronger and came faster one after another as they changed.

The door of the house slammed open, then shut, and the bottle Günter had been carrying smashed loudly against a tree between the house and the lake. He came crashing down the footpath, bellowing inarticulately and blind enough not to see Gus and I quietly sliding out of his way and up the sides of the dock steps as he came heavily down the center, but able to see the guitar that had been dangling from Gus's hand before he jerked it away. With his left hand, the one that had held the bottle, he smashed the guitar with a crunching sound against the rock wall that grew out of either side of the stairway; bits of wood and

a tuneless groan spun into the air. I looked at Gus and he did not move. When Günter got to the dock he stopped and set his feet apart on the thin length of boards, bracing himself. He stopped yelling. He took aim ahead, forward, at some spot that seemed to me to be high up on one of the mountains directly across the lake, and he fired the gun, six times, pausing between each shot to scream "FUCK YOU" into the darkness. When the gun was empty he grunted and threw it far out into the center of the lake, where it broke the solidity of the water's surface and then disappeared from sight. Günter did not move from the dock. He braced his feet again and leaned out over the water, shouting "FUCK YOU FUCK YOU FUCK" and swaying over the edge of the dock, not as though it were something he was trying to decide but as if the water and the dock were fighting over which one was going to get him, who would have possession.

The cop car pulled into the driveway noiselessly but with a shudder that ran through the house and the ground and that made Gus and I turn to look at it. Lights washed over us, exposing. Günter seemed not to notice, kept screaming at the dark water and the mountains and the patchwork trees whose color was gone against the blackness.

YOU FUCK YOU FUCK YOU FUCK YOU FUCK YOU

It occurred to me that he might be talking to the wind again.

The cop was big. He swept by Gus and I and down the steps to the dock where Günter was standing, the shouts getting softer and softer as his voice was used up. He grabbed Günter from behind, one arm over his right shoulder and down across his chest and the other meeting it from underneath Günter's left arm, and dragged him away from the edge of the dock and back up the steps and across the lawn. Günter's feet bounced loosely over stones and limbs in the grass and he struggled with the cop's arms around him. He was screaming the entire way but the words barely came out now, just a violent desperate whisper, and the look in his eyes was still empty and distant and alone, not even seeing the cop or the lake which was moving fast away from him as he was dragged to the car. The cop pressed him against the side of the car and clipped cuffs onto his wrists, then squashed him into the backseat without a word. Günter's mouth was still moving but no noise was coming out.

We went to get Günter out of the jail the next morning. Inside it was cold, the air was heavy and sluggish and dim, no heat coming from the ribbed radiators against the opposite walls, and the outlines of things seemed to have blurred and grown indeterminate as though with a haze. Günter was there, in the back of the cell, which was about about ten by twelve with two cots pressed against cornering walls. He

was sitting on one of these. His head was down, staring at cracks on the floor or something else small and far away, but he looked up when he heard us come through the door led by the big cop. There was a smell in the cell room. Günter got up from the bed and came over to the bars to talk to us. He was quiet now and when he spoke his voice was hoarse but easy. His eyes were still vacant—he saw us but he wasn't looking at us, he wasn't really there—they never got that sense of presence back again; it was as though he had screamed his eyes into a distant corner of his brain that was separated from the front by a thick haze that only let shapes and muted colors pass through it. McTeague told him what the cop had told us, that they had to keep him in there for at least twenty-four hours because he had been so crazy when they came and got him, and because he had been creating a public nuisance with a deadly weapon. They had had four calls from all over the place, one woman from the other side of the lake even, to complain about Günter's screaming and the gunshots. They had especially not liked the FUCK YOUS, which I thought would please Günter but he didn't say much about it. He listened and he nodded. They were going to let him out the next morning, one more night in the jail, which he said wasn't really all that bad, then they were going to let him go and lower the bail from \$500 to \$250.

Günter said all right, thanked McTeague and me, then he turned to Gus and said "Sorry" in his hoarse quiet voice, but he never said anything about the guitar. The big cop led us back out of the cell room and held the door for us to pass through, then stood and watched us walk to the car and drive away before shutting it again.

In the third year, the last year, Gus came up to ski in the mountains on the border of Vermont. It was close to New Year's Day but there was still no good snow, we had even had some rain, and on the last day of December the slopes were crowded with people up for the day to celebrate in jacuzzis and hot tubs after wine in the snow on the decks of their condos. Gus and I sat in the living room and watched Elvis movies on a cable television channel from Boston, an Elvis festival. I had brought my guitar, a new one I bought that fall for less than a hundred dollars, slick with "Alvarez Regent" stenciled across the top of the headstock in ornate gold letters, and Gus played it a lot—still banging on muted strings that he couldn't quite get down—but he didn't pass it, didn't slide it across the couch to me the way he had on the dock with the unbroken string of chords and notes. He held it to himself most of the time. Elvis was a cliff-diver, a night-club performer, gambler, race-car driver, small-time hood with a heart of gold. Around his neck there was always a guitar, always his fingers moving up and down the fretboard, his hand swinging up and down against the

strings; and somewhere, off-camera, behind curtains or trees or the walls of houses, a band backing him up. Violins and drums, pianos, trumpets, barbershop quartets in perfect harmonies. Again and again and again he was on the screen, Viva Las Vegas, Viva Acapulco, Viva Elvis; and we watched all of him.

When night came and it was dark on the mountain we went out of the condo to walk. It had turned cold despite the rain; on the hill near the top someone had even said it had been snowing earlier in the day, lightly, just powder, but just powder was better than nothing. The roads, which were only ten-foot dirt paths cut into the woods between the parking lots and the condo complexes, were icy and sprinkled over with a layer of light-brown crumbly sand. We slid down a hill and through a lot in the direction of the lodges and bars at the base of the mountain. Jeep Cherokees passed by on the drives, people hanging out the windows and shouting; dogs, bottles of champagne, silver hats and pom-poms. At the base lodge the parking lot was full and in the corner a group of old men, drunk and with balloons pinned to the buttons of their tuxedos, were leaning on one another singing Auld Lang Syne in French, which I did not know but which Gus could understand. Somewhere on the mountain fireworks began but because of the trees we couldn't see them when they burst, just long trails of yellow and white sparks and a whisshing sound as they rose, then an explosion of thunder that shook the ground, then shouts and yells, ooh, ahhh, goddamn, that was a good one, happy new year, joe, you sonofabitch and clapping until the next streak lifted into the sky.

From the parking lot we crossed a wooden footbridge over a frozen stream and then we were at the base of the mountain itself. Ski trails twisted up the side to the peak, wandering in and out of groves of pine trees, wide at the bottom and then tapering to frail steepness at the top of the hill, where there were no trees because the air was so thin, though we couldn't see that far up because of the darkness and because of the mist that came from the snowblowers trying to cover the tops of the trails with a thin film of soft squeaky snow for the first morning runs. There were no lights on the hill, nothing but the moon to see by, painting things not in black and white but in black and blue-black pine trees and blue snow; only the moon itself and the stars were white, white against a black bottomless sky.

We began to walk up the mountain. On one side the huge T-poles of the ski lifts hung suspended and frozen, great telegraph cables shooting in thin dark threads up the sides of the mountain, two by two, every fifty feet a dangling chair, displaced veranda swings that were empty and motionless, not even swaying in the wind. On the mountain it was colder and the sky was closer, all around us. We didn't smoke

because we had both quit at the end of the fall, had quit and started running together, five miles in the middle of the night then back to Gus's apartment for a beer. Gus said that he was training for the Olympics, but we hadn't run in three weeks or so and he didn't say much about it anymore so I assumed it had fallen through, which was probably just as well, the Americans never seemed to do well in cross-country skiing. We passed from the broad bases of the slopes into a place where trees rose on either side of the trail and the light was weaker. In my boots crunching through the slick crust of ice that had formed over the snow my toes had gone numb, so that I tried to move them, to warm them up, but it wasn't helping. Gus talked about what he would do after he left in the spring, maybe head out to Colorado and get a job as a ski lift operator—they'd give you meals and a condo for thirty bucks a month and free skiing during the season when you weren't working; he could start training again for the Olympics and in two years he might be ready. His voice was unsure, unconvinced.

We moved closer to the trees at the edge of the trail, saw how the snow did not stop where the pine trunks began but covered the floors of the groves as well, the trees up close spread out and stuck each one alone in the still-moving ocean of blue moonlight. And then we reached a clearing and the sky was on all sides again and the moon strong, and we stopped walking, turned and looked back down the mountain, no more than halfway up, the lights of the lodges still visible in yellow rows far down below, the fields of blue snow. The fireworks had stopped and we were too high to hear the music and singing of the crowds. And all at once I had a feeling, the cold in my feet and the acid wind against my face, the sky pressing down on us with its darkness and its foreverness and the blue and black of the hill, silent except for the smoke breath coming from my own mouth and from Gus's; small and naked, an old feeling and who hasn't felt it, but I wasn't ready then. I had a powerful urge to sit down, to fall and let the icy stiffness creep slowly up my legs and back, into my stomach and my lungs and to my head, an urge to become a part of the blue and black landscape, a dark dot on the hill between the wires of the lifts and the haphazard clumps of trees.

There was no motion for a moment and Gus said to me, maybe I'll come back—you know, take courses in the fall. I could come back and play guitar. I could talk to some people, see what I can do, see if they'll let me do that. A cloud of blue smoke-breath hung in front of his mouth, words frozen like dust and suspended in the biting air. Maybe I'll be back, he said.

Up above us there was a noise, cough and sputter and then a rumble, a diesel growling from behind the veil of snowblown mist. Gus

and I turned and looked toward the top of the hill. We moved into a better position on the trail. There was nothing, only mist and the low guttural sound. Then all at once six dots, three pairs yellow and round, peering through the cloud. We began to walk up the hill so that we could see them better. The noise became louder and the dots—spots of color, yellow lights, in the world of blue and black—grew and spread out across the top of the hill, following the paths of snow wandering between bursts of darkness. Dark shapes emerged from the cloud, large lumbering tank-like shapes, the yellow dots their headlights, plunging methodically down the slopes. Gus and I stood still and watched them up above us. At times the twin lights and the lumpy black bodies would disappear behind a grove of trees marking a bend in a rail or a ridge on the mountain, but the noise persisted and grew louder, a huge mechanical buzz-roar rolling down the mountain, carrying with it the physical presence of the great black shapes, the glowing eyes, the wide iron-spiked treads grinding and chopping the snow that had been frozen, leaving behind a broken chunky trail that would be covered with powder from the blowers. We could not move. We were frozen to the side of the hill, watching one of the machines, the great black growling blob, turn a bend and start down the trail we were standing on, moving slowly but deliberately, mechanically. It tumbled on, passed out of sight around a bend in the path, then back again and over a ridge above us so that now it was in a direct line with the place where we stood.

Huge and black, yellow lights no longer dots but great blazing pools, washing us in a wave that was bright but that had no warmth, causing us to squint into the noise and rush. Seventy-five yards now and still we did not move, we stood and stared, waited, squinting into the lights, waited until we could hear the squeaking crunch of the icy snow grinding under great wide unstoppable treads. Then in one motion we turned and ran, Gus in front and me following behind him, so close that the snow kicked up by his boots landed cold and wet drops on my face, ran in a sudden burst of furious motion, weaving in and out of the trees on the border of the trail, through black and over blue. The rumble of the machine stayed close behind us, the bright wash of headlights stretched out before us and cast long jerking shadows across the snow. In my boots my toes began to thaw, warmth ached outward from my belly. The wind was like razors through the shell of my jacket and cutting into my skin. Gus was screaming now, piercing the constant machine rumble as he ran ducking and weaving. And we did not stop, down the side of the mountain, the great diesel roar and the yellow floodlights and the huge unstopping black shape behind us, the hot pounding of my legs and Gus's echoing scream, running.

Chris Harrington



John Nilsson

Eric and the Lake

Eric dips below the quiet waves beyond
The wake of motor boats
Far out into the lake
That's not much greater than a pond
But it's so much deeper than a pond

Drifted out across the moon-still glaze
Of light on water
He ought to have kept within the shadows
He ought to have stayed near weed-green willows
That drape along the shore

Till yesterday
They'd never seen
A boy, so blue, so far beneath
The rasping heat above

They watch him grasping at the glare
And twitch in swimming sympathy
His frenzy spent, he retches once and stills
And settles thistle soft onto the water down

He joins them there
Beyond the waves and wakes and willows' fading glare

Robert Alexander

Twos and Threes

Yesterday was the final day of the drought
and the neighborhood was in an uproar.

For Old Man Noah was building a boat
in Mrs. Appleby's backyard.

The rumors were flitting around like the parched summer leaves
of that old oak outside Mary's window.

Finally, little Susie Darkins shyly stepped out and said,
"Old Man, what are you doing?"

And he bent his shriveled face down to hers
and whispered in a dry voice that rattled through his body
like a stone lost in Momma's empty pickle jar,

"Honey, I'm SAVIN' your world."

Today the heat got 'im and he died on the porch.
At least it began to rain.

Eric Slavin

Dad

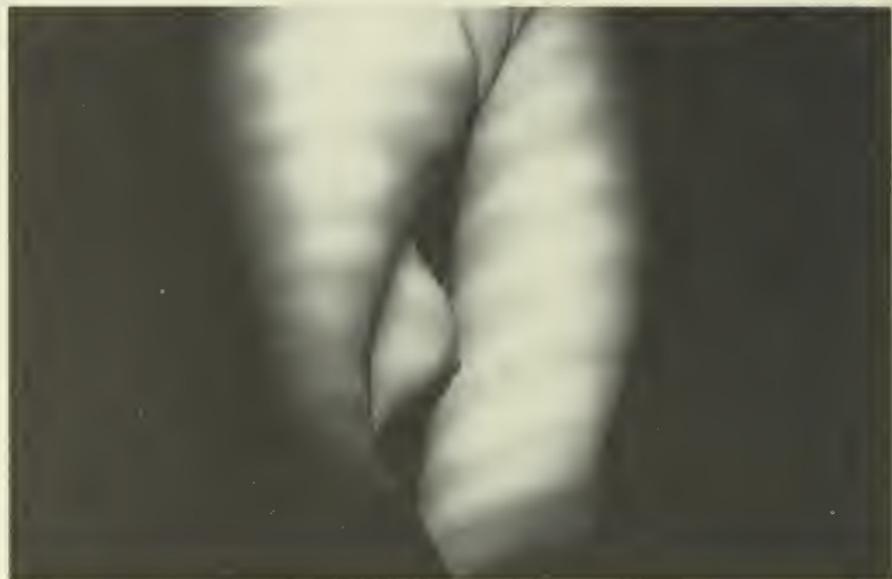
I have been wanting to ask you
during all these years
we've had more important things
like research papers and business meetings
while you've been breaking grounds
with your new family and me
off at school getting ready for
a lifetime when days-off are rare
when you plan on driving with me
across the country like we talked about
over a roadmap on the dinner table and
whether or not you remember
how many promises you made
while I was about to go ride bikes
with Jimmy or fly kites
or light off bottle rockets
at the Circle or if you just
wanted to catch me on the way out
each time so maybe I'd rush into
your arms and kiss your bearded mouth
or play with your nose like I used to
or if you really meant that someday
we would just get in the car,
you and me, and drive to where
we can talk about why it has
taken us all these years
of growing apart
to get there.

Eric Slavin

For Your Reassurance

May my words be like the masking tape
I found in the kitchen drawer
beside the paper clips and refrigerator tabs
where you have saved my longest letters
written from a desk above the Rue de Poirier
posted 1969 when still a traveler
glaring through the window at telephone wires
placing in misshapen words the solace of separation,
how like water through open locks our skin is seamless
how we harbor ourselves within remembrance,
lapping from the shell of your hip the same salts,
in your hair the wisteria from the gazebo at Jacob's Pillow
its slight tresses mending the contours of my spine
this grove you've tilled with such thorns pressing me
pulling my beard between your teeth,
seeding our last essential grains, us,
ineffable you.

These were sighs crushed and expired in time,
how the breakers had tormented us,
a postcard from Stein am Rhein, fragments of bad poetry,
the weather's fine, language no greater than a single space,
And while now we have only these,
you advance from the doorway,
letters open on the counter,
I unpeel the tape in the usual way
"You know," I say "the human body is cracked in many places..."
You move into me,
never having doubted my return.

John Walke

Daniel Manatt

The Break

"HAR-OLD!"

He didn't shift his eyes, nor lift his head, nor straighten up as she began bitching at him for the thirteenth time this shopping trip, but rather stayed hunched over, left hand still clutching the shopping cart handle, staring at the lobsters. She stormed past the popsicles, the ice cream, the T.V. dinners, slaloming awkwardly yet furiously between shopping carts, her amorphous hips bouncing with each step while her hand, clutching the wrong box, stayed steady in the air, as rigid as her control of him.

"Har-old! You got the wrong box of Raisin Bran! I told you to get Post Raisin Bran, not Kellogg's." She didn't notice that he hadn't turned; after 34 years she just assumed that his silences were the conversational heir to his youthful contemplations which had long since become nothing more than moments of numbness. Or perhaps she didn't even expended the energy of assumption on him anymore.

She seized the family size box (God, not only the wrong brand but the wrong size!) and exchanged it with the correct cereal, bouncing it off the Green Giant cans, then turning and storming back down Aisle 12 towards the bakery.

Harold stayed still. He had straightened up by the end of her tirade, but stopped again once she had gone and returned his gaze to them.

The lobsters. The dozen upon dozen of bright red lobsters, tracked down the coast from Maine, terrified by the transport and their awful stay in the A&P seafood department's lobster tank, the aquarium equivalent of death row. The aquarium itself was tucked in on one side by flounder, mercifully killed at the catch, and by beef cuts on the other. But they lived on; the god of Hormel had not been as good to them, and they crawled over each other, desperately waiting Thermidor.

The horror.

Between the produce and the dairy falls the shadow.

The horror.

Harold's legs began moving, though his eyes stayed at counter level. By the time he was staring at the strudel display, the sound of a young woman's voice announcing a dog food special over the market's P.A. system snapped his concentration; he looked up, and around at the shoppers, hands clawing the baskets familiarly. One woman, her child not in the cart's child seat/knick-knack depository as diagrammed on

the cart flap, kept pushing her glasses up the bridge of her nose, in search of the nasal notch that Yahwey and Eyes Only forgot to install. Hers were thick, making her eyes, when viewed from the front, look as if they were protruding from her skull, like tips of antennae rather than cataracts set back into her head.

His eyes turned downwards, as they had been doing for years, this time to check the list she had made. He had crossed off seven of the eleven items in pencil, which she would confirm by canceling the items in her indelible, infallible ink. Rice A' Roni—done. One dozen extra large, brown eggs—done. Paper towel (economy size)—done. Carrots (the ones in the cute bag)—done. Chlorox—done.

He sought out the store directory for the eighth time (she had once tried to explain that if he studied the cart he need consult it only once, but since the firing, Harold's been—well, you know). Kleenex is... He found it. Right next to the paper towel. Something in the back of his mind (though his mind, obscured by gnarly strings of black-gray hair so disheveled it looked as if it should be white, didn't always seem to function properly, she said, as if she had made good on her childhood dream of becoming a surgeon) told him he could have saved time and eff...

Saved time. Why save time? His thoughts drifted back to the lobsters. What did time mean to them?

Happily, the frozen tater tots were near the butcher's section, and he paid the lobsters a return visit. They were still there, no Spartacus among their ranks. A chill ran up his spine; he wasn't certain if it was the twisted empathy or the cold from the juice freezer whose door had been opened and closed by a child discovering the wonders of hinges, freon, and consumerism.

Haven't I seen that holey cardigan that stops right above that flabby navel before? thought the seafood manager. Oh, yeah. Harold, the lobster guy.

"How are you doing today, sir?"

Those damn rubber bands. They said we needed them for our own good, to protect ourselves from our own claws, to keep us from killing each other. Damn continental shelf fascists! We know the truth—they just want to

HOW ARE YOU DOING TODAY, sir?

Harold looked up. he glance at the man's reddened apron, like those at Auschwitz. He looked at his hands, not banded with rubber, but clutching a cleaver. He looked at his neck—not a separate segment, but the fleshy bridge between his torso and head. But the eyes. The eyes, through the plexiglass window (the coroner's office must stay chilled)

looked like the woman's. In the recesses of his eyes, he saw the look, the appeal, the

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"No. No thank you." The man turned to his unfinished chicken salad (that's blasphemy!) in disgust, which didn't make it taste any better, and Harold again turned to gaze at his insoulmates. Thrown one on top of the other. The social order turned against itself, cannibalism forced upon us. They left us no room; on the bottom of the ocean there had been plenty. They probably would say that the earth's surface is three-quarters land. They'd probably say we're better off here, serving, or begin served. They'd probably report us to management, in fact they did, launching a full-staff investigation that resulted in the dismissal of

I should have been a pair of ragged hooves...

"HAROLD!" It was deafening even to him this time, though it was his fellow shoppers and lobsters that felt humiliated when she yanked him bodily and threw him into the 20 express line (alas! They had 23!)

andyou'regoingtostayinthislineifyouknowwhat'sgoodforyouwhileget foodforboogumsdoyouhear meandnofunnystuff.

He obliged, staring forward at the box boy, upon whose shoulders the cashier, herself banded, stood. There's a specter haunting Super-fresh. The inanity of freeze-dried life. Useless assistant managerial idiots. One space in line backwards to move two forward.

He was entertained until she had come back, threw the last item down, and threw the check-out bar down, marking the last of their purchases. As she picked up the tabloid with the diet she would read about but never try, he stared hard at the check-out bar. It looked so familiar. Ten, twenty, thirty years ago? A plastic curtain is descending in the front of the line. Charlie?

She was far too engrossed in the soap digest to notice the sweat beading on his forehead and the pale bulge of his eyes, extending forth like

His head pivoted furiously to the right, finding the tank in a moment. The woman in front was still bickering about whether she could use her 2 for 1 and 30 cents off coupons for the same

Lobsters! Brothers! Comrades! (They stared back desperately) You are being used, nay, eaten by the bourgeois! Permanent migration, developed by the bearded manta ray, is the only hope, and mass flight, as Red Carp has said before she swam into a net she knew was there. Garnishing is the opiate of the catches!

He slid his left foot under the back wheel, swiveling the basket furiously, with the push of the left arm and charge of the fight leg, he began the emancipation. Nobody seemed to notice, nobody cared.

Lobsters of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your

rubber bands!

He yelled as he slammed the front of the cart into the aquarium, the safety plastic corner smashing into the glass, shattering it and, along with it, he thought, the conspiracy of supermarkets everywhere! He had done it! He had set his people free!

The water rushed out, and the lobsters, spilling onto the floor in a blurred mess, thrown painfully onto the backs of their shells, more terrified than ever.

Harold's smile of liberation melted back into the numb frown of desperation once again as the manager began yelling at the top of his lungs, as the Police Station received the call, and as she let his head have it with the purse, screaming hysterically about how this was the last straw and how she should have committed him long ago.

And the lobsters all died of asphyxiation and dehydration.

Contributors' Notes

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John Walke is a senior English major who plans to attend law school next year. This photograph was taken during his year in Paris.

Announcements

The Newman Ivey White Award for Literature is being presented for the ninth year to the Duke undergraduates with the outstanding samples of poetry and fiction in *The Archive*. The judges are selected from the Duke community by the management of the Gothic Bookshop. The names of the judges may not be made public. The prize consists of a \$50.00 gift certificate to be used at any of the Duke University Stores. The winners of the Newman Ivey White Award for this issue are Rob Odom for *Come September* and Laura Carter for *Turning*.

Newman Ivey White graduated from Trinity College in 1913 (M.A. 1914) and taught at Trinity College and Duke University from 1919 to 1948, serving as chairman of the Department of English from 1943 to 1948. He edited W.C. Jackson's *An Anthology of Verse by American Negroes* (1924) and *American Negro Folk Songs* (1928). In 1943, he became general editor of the Frank C. Brown Collection of North American Folklore.

White was a noted scholar on Shelley and published many works, among them an anthology *The Best of Shelley* (1932), *The Unextinguised Hearth: Shelley and His Contemporary Critics* (1938), a two-volume biography, *Shelley* (1930), and *Portrait of Shelley* (1945).



ARCHIVE

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Christopher Harrington



Rob Odom

Cut Grass and Cinders

Emily picked at the long splinters in the wood beneath her as she watched him out at the edge of the yard where the fields began. She sat on the front steps. She could see he was having trouble. Every so often the lawn mower would quit on him. It was a heavy thing. The grass that clumped in the grease under the wheels made it hard to push. It was loud; it sounded angry. It would quit on him every so often, and she would watch him yank the cord until he finally got it going. David cursed loud so she could hear him. *He's too thin for this*, she thought. He was not their father. That man could heave his weight and start the thing with one pull as if he'd made a bargain with it long ago.

David pushed the thing over the yard by leaning his whole weight into it. It was slow progress, but she was patient watching him. She sat full in the sunlight so he would see her as he passed the house. It was a hot day. Her loose skirt clung damp against her legs. She pulled her hair back and lifted it off her neck. The air was swollen. It hurt her to breathe too deeply or suddenly; so she sat quietly and turned her head and leaned out just a little when he was too far to one side for her to see.

He was out in the yard a good hour before it happened. He'd just come around the house and was moving out toward the fields when he ran over a nest of yellow-jackets buried just underground. Then they were on him. They were on his face and in his hair. They clung to his legs as he ran. Emily stood up. She heard him curse even over the roaring mower. When he'd got to the far end of the yard, she saw him drop to the ground and roll. He'd got to his knees by the time she'd reached him, but he had his hands firm in the grass like he couldn't stand. She knelt beside him and laid her hand on his shoulder. His head was bent over, and she couldn't see his face.

"Shit, Emily." He shook his head slowly like it hurt him.

She was going to hush him, but he looked up at her and she stopped herself. There were angry red lumps on his neck and under his eyes. "Oh, David. You'll be lucky if they don't swell shut," she said. She rubbed away some dirt on his chin and helped him to stand. Then she set her hand to the small of his back and led him across the yard and into the kitchen. There she sat himdown in a chair and filled a little tub with hot water.

Their father was a big man. He filled up half the doorway with just one foot across the threshold and turned sideways like he only meant to check. "What's happened?" he asked.

"Jesus," David said.

"You run over a damned hornet's nest, didn't you?" He leaned

his head into the kitchen and steadied himself with one hand against the doorframe. "You run over it when I tell you to look out. You listen to me next time, maybe." One of his eyes got a little bigger. He nodded his head at the boy.

"Jesus," David said.

Emily brought the tub over and set it on the floor in front of him. She took off his shoes and set them together beside the tub. When she rolled up his pant legs, she found where the bees had stung him around his ankles. She shook her head. She felt sick.

"Pray Jesus will give you some sense next time."

David looked at the ceiling. His hair was too long in the front and back. Emily lifted water from the tub and let it run down his legs. She smoothed the hair down around his ankles. She whispered something he couldn't hear. She held the underside of one calf firmly in her hand.

Then he came in, when they had begun to believe he wouldn't. "I told you. You don't listen."

"You told me to mow the lawn," David said. "You told me to clear the field."

"I shouldn't have had to get after you for it. It should've been done." He moved over to the window so the boy's back was to him. "You lie about this house, I will set you to work." He ran his hand through his hair. His high square forehead was edged with sweat. "I shouldn't have to get after you."

"Jesus." David said it loud. Emily flinched. She worked the water into the bee stings with a corner of the cloth she held in her fist. He cursed under his breath and yanked his foot away from her. Some of the water splashed out of the tub and across the floor.

"I'm sorry," she said. She wrung out the cloth and spread it out over the puddle beside the tub.

"You watch your tongue," the father said. "I've had enough of your smartness for one sitting." He opened a round tin and smelled it to see that the tobacco was good. Then he worked a wad of it between his fingers and set it in his jaw. "It was your foolishness that got you those pains. You can lay off the girl, or I'll throttle you good."

David stood up then and turned to face him. He was thin, but he was of a good height. The swelling made him fierce. "Fuck you," he said. Then he closed his eyes. He looked as if he was going to cry.

The man didn't seem to hear him for a moment. He just stood there. His lower lip held the lump of tobacco. Slowly, so slow Emily knew what was happening every moment, he stepped toward his son. Then he swung his arm very high. His fist hung in the air and then it came down. He knocked the boy flat on the floor beside the tub. "I don't want to fuck you," the man said. His hand went to his hair and then to his side. "I don't ever want to fuck you. If you start talking like that, you

can get out."

David got up on his knees. His upper lip was cracked, and there was blood on his teeth. "Poor bastard," he said. "You're so ugly no one'd fuck you anyway."

The father grinned big. He spit a glob of the tobacco between them. "Emily, clean the shit off of this floor." He went out into the yard to see about the mower.

Emily lifted the tub and emptied it out back. When she came in, David was still sitting on the floor beside the chair. He'd lit a cigarette, and he was moving the water around on the floor with one finger. She handed him the cloth and let him wipe his face clean; then she took it to the sink and rinsed it with water. "You can put baking soda on your legs. Wrap a bandage around it, if you want." He was staring at the floor; he didn't say a word. So she said, "I don't know about the ones around your face."

"I know."

"Only hope your eyes don't swell shut." She turned around from the sink and offered him the cloth again. When he didn't take it, she sat in the chair and held it in her lap. "You won't be much to look at for awhile, anyway."

"Jesus, Emily. I know." He inhaled through the cigarette and blew the smoke off to the side. She was rocking one foot on its toe. He shook his head. "You're a little young to be mothering anybody," he said. "You're too late to start mothering me."

"You're not so old."

"No, not so old."

"What do you mean, too late?" She was smiling, but he didn't answer her. "He'll kill you if he sees you smoking in the house," she said.

"I don't care."

"Come outside."

He just sat there.

"What're you going to do?"

"I'm going to smoke this cigarette."

"He'll know," she said.

"You going to tell him?"

"He'll find out."

She watched him tap off the cigarette ash and rub it into his jeans.

"Take me with you," she said.

He stopped. He worked the ash into a black smear up his thigh.

"No."

They were quiet a long time. "You'll be all right," she said. "You give him a couple of days, I think."

"I don't have a couple of days."

He got up from the floor and went to the window and lifted it open. It was getting on toward evening, and the wind through the open window felt cool. He turned the stub of his cigarette in his fingers, then he flicked it through the window. He watched it turn end over end in the air, glowing red for a moment against the sky.

She dreamed about him that night. She remembered a time that he had chased her through the field when it was just summer and the tobacco was very green. Their mother gave them lemonade, and she wore an apron that was smooth and white down to her ankles. Their father was rolling tobacco into cigarettes and cutting the ends with a sharp knife from the kitchen. Then she heard a door closing as if from a long way off. She sat up in the bed, lifted off the covers, and got to her feet. She leaned with her forehead against the wall until the cool wallpaper brought her to her senses. Then she went into the hall.

It was dark in the house. She ran her fingers along the bare walls to guide her. When she got to his room, she hesitated. Here she was a stranger, uninvited. She was frightened, but the door was partway open. So she stumbled through it without knocking. She feared what she would find.

The window was open, and in the moonlight, his twisting sheets seemed like marble. But when she kneeled beside them, she found they still remembered him. They were warm, only recently abandoned. They smelled of smoke and of leaves and of cut grass and cinders. She breathed through them until her eyes were wet and sore. Then slowly, she went and shut the door. She traced the squareness of it with her finger. She lay in the bed and pulled the sheets around her. She meant to stay there until he found her. He would get as far as the highway, she thought, before he turned back. He would be home before morning. She would keep the bed warm for him. He would find her there, and she would smile to let him see that she'd understood him. She would smile to tell him that she knew.

David did not return that night or all the next day. She sat on the front steps to wait for him. She picked away at the wood beneath her to pass the time. About noon, her father got out the lawn mower and set it out in the yard where the boy had left it the day before. The stretch of land between her and the machine was still overgrown with long grass and clover. She watched the bees cling to the small white flowers. Their position was uncertain, their flight erratic. Then she saw the smoke. It was dark in the air just over the rise of the hill where the fields began. Emily leaped up from the steps and ran out across the yard. But almost before she reached the start of the rise, she knew. This was the smell of tobacco burning, now so overpowering it made her weak. The grass beneath her was coarse and dry and for one

wild moment it seemed she was running up the back of some enormous animal. *This smoke will wake it*, she thought. *The ground will rise*. She only knew to run.

The fields did not burn long. Someone had taken kerosene to the stalks, but the fire did not spread far beyond where it began. Live tobacco doesn't burn, her father had said long before, even in drought years. He was the one who found the fuel can, lying empty, deep in the field. It was cooler that evening. Emily searched the fields for him. Early dusk leached away the warmth from the tobacco and the grasses and left them stiff and colorless all around her. She walked every row. She rubbed the tobacco leaves into her hands and traced her skin with the ash. She left her shoes in the yard. She felt the earth cool beneath her and the rocks in the soil and the warmth in the ash.

She looked for the places where the heel of his boot would have left a mark in the ground. She smelled him in the leaves, musty and damp. She traced his path from the edge of the fire to the place where he'd dropped the can. She thought she would follow him even further. She'd make her way across the rest of this field and into the next one which was corn. About a mile away was the highway. She'd hitch a ride with a trucker going north into Richmond. He would turn around suddenly and find her standing in the doorway. He'd have his cigarettes.

She looked out toward the house and saw her father in the yard. He was getting the lawn mower back in the shed. He pushed it by leaning his whole weight into it. When he had it put up, he walked back into the yard and called for her to come in.

Laura Nien-Hwa Ch'ien Fishing Wish

Often at night
Do you look into the sky,
Where the moon
Floats
Like a pearly fly
Waiting
For a catch?

A boy has escaped
Through his bedroom
Window. He's climbed
A willow tree that hangs
Down its branches into a
Stream.
Dangling his feet in play,
the boy makes this wish.

If I were a fish
That lived in the sky, *I*
Would be looking
Down at man.
How funny he would look—
A stick with five branches, and
All five of them moving. I'd catch him
A bright-eyed crawling thing and
Watch him grow sad and old. Or maybe
I'd catch a whole bunch of his kind,
Fry them and eat them
Like stars.

Sally Rosen

Certainty

I was sitting on the bus
With my hair in a knot
Waiting to get there.
She saw this as a problem
She could fix.

The red paper passed
From her to me.
Trained just right by Mama
With a string of nights behind me
Filled with paper curlers
And crossed legs
I said thank you.
She said that's right.
The transfusion
That joined us
Said
Save yourself.
God is love.

It must be so easy
To think you can hand over
Solutions
From this leather bag
To that empty pocket,
To think you can know
A problem
By the knot in the hair
Or the direction the bus
Is headed in—
To think that those who breathe clean air
In the right chapter and out the right verse
Twisting their curlers
Crossing their legs
Haven't got a problem.

The rest of us
Aren't so sure.
We read about the drought, the wide
Sweep of music
And shuffle towards bus stops
Hands in pockets
Waiting for the last arrival.

Mute laughter, and dust.
It has not come.

Nick Sholley



Dana Wynne Lindquist Relocating

Shelia stood at the kitchen sink staring out the window at the summer furniture still on the patio and said to herself no, no she would not do anything all day but think of the things she was supposed to be thinking of: Was it after nine already? Did she leave that upstairs window open again? It was raining. The dog must be let in.

But the back lawn lay too flat this morning for any one person trying to gain control of an overly quiet house. She stood mesmerized by all that wet grass and the slicks of red mud which reached back into the next lot.

When she was five, Shelia had gotten into trouble with Mrs. Dawson at The Warren School for pouring out the entire contents of her watercoloring-glass onto five perfectly clean pieces of newsprint. As the green water ran off desk top and down each of the four legs, Shelia calmly called for Mrs. Dawson's assistance, politely apologized for her grass painting gone awry, and proceeded to explain just how spilled-out every back lawn on her street looked, especially after a hard rain.

"No fences," Shelia told Mrs. Dawson matter-of-factly. "Can't have any fences in Glendale, so all the yards just run together. That's what grass is about in my neighborhood: It's about running together too fast to say when."

Mrs. Dawson, who was down on her knees, furiously sponging up green puddles with stacks of brown paper towels, did not respond. Shelia didn't think her apology had been heard, and she was certain that it wasn't being understood. She bent down next to this large, round lady, and went after a meandering tributary of green paint just rounding the leg of her chair.

"Mrs. Dawson," she started again, somehow instinctively knowing the woman always heard her own name, "Did holding hands ever make you feel like you were gonna fall down?" Shelia paused, hoping for at least a nod of acknowledgement. "Don't you know how going down hills all in one big group kinda makes you lose your balance?"

"Shelia, would you please take that dirty smock off and put it in the hamper. We'll talk about the watercolors tomorrow," Mrs. Dawson said.

"We were talking about grass." Shelia had already decided that this woman was what her mother called a bad listener. "And grass in my neighborhood is about running together till you forget who's the middle, who's the left side, who's the right side, and you just have to let go, and fall down."

Mrs. Dawson had conquered the mess and was off to put other things in order.

The dog's leash gave a quick jerk around its post. He let out a yelp. It was coming down hard now, making the kind of noise Shelia needed. She reached down under the sink for one of the plastic grocery bags that stayed behind the garbage can, ripped it halfway up one seam, and pulled it down firmly over her head. The smell of her new perm came down on her with a nauseating intensity that reminded her just how perky she had planned on being today.

She walked out onto the back stoop. Let the screen door slam. As she bent over to grab Floyd's leash, the water coming off the edge of the roof struck the back of her neck, hitting her skin before it reached her sweatshirt. She stood up and tilted forward just enough to send the water over her shoulders and down her arms. Then she waited. It was going to reach her hands. This was it: she could have been naked on the back stoop for about five minutes. She could have been. Her skin and the rain. Water streamed down her arms, reached her cupped hands. Fingers pressed tightly together, she tried to hold a handful before it started to seep through her fingers. Her sweatshirt began to pull down heavy on her back. It didn't feel like summer rain anymore.

Jim never would have stood for it, her standing there getting soaking wet in the middle of a weekday morning with a long list of things to take care of hanging squarely on the refrigerator door. She could feel him getting angry at her, and it felt good. He'd be standing there—right next to the deep freezer in the utility room—looking out at her and working up a good anger. She knew he'd be telling himself just how right he was to wonder what she ever got done all day. Always knew what she didn't get done. "Count 'em," he'd say, "count 'em and tell me why they're always the things I'd said needed to be done last week or we'd have ourselves a headache ever trying to get caught up."

It felt good to have Jim watch her as she walked circles around Floyd's tie-out. He almost never watched her casually. Watched her hard, like he was keeping track of something that required a real steady eye. Shelia held the muddied leash in one hand, secured her plastic bag with the other. Floyd could get himself so thoroughly tangled up that freeing him took a sort of carefully choreographed ritual dance. Watching Shelia execute this family rite was just the kind of thing that would break Jim up. He'd be laughing, at least to himself, so she took her time. She was already completely wet anyway.

Floyd always got his paws wiped at the back door. Jim had made him to understand he had no choice in this matter. The dog got revenge by shaking out his wet weight at whoever had made him stand on three legs four separate times.

In October, it'd be a year since Nelson had phoned Shelia up asking could he come over to talk with her. Nelson never asked to talk with anyone. He just said what it pleased him to say when it pleased him to say it. She knew something wasn't right. Figured maybe he didn't like her advising Ellie to look for a better job. As it turned out, Nelson didn't do much talking at all. He and Shelia just sat at the kitchen table for several hours, staring vaguely past each other, trying every now and then to make a little conversation. When the phone finally rang, Nelson got it. Before he'd hung up, Shelia'd gone to get her coat. They swung by to pick up Ellie, drove all the way to Greensboro in silence, and made it to the airport by seven. Nelson went with Shelia to identify the body. Ellie waited in the car, the radio on real low, listening to some country music station out of Kernersville. They drove back to Durham without ever mentioning Jim's name.

Jim himself had always been a talker. Not so much a conversationalist, just a talker. Which may have been why he and Nelson had gotten on so well. Neither of them really required a listener, most of the time. Jim had always done a good bit of coaxing and cajoling of recalcitrant, inanimate objects: the car, the TV, his old electric razor. Once, when Shelia's mother had come to stay the weekend, she'd spent three days responding to half-heard requests and pleas coming from every corner of the house. Jim would say to the TV in the back den, "Would you please, just this once, work when I really want you to," or to the car in the carport "I got the part you needed last week. What the hell can you be wanting now?" And Shelia's mother would answer from her freezer-cleaning project, "Did you need something, Jim?"

Shelia had learned early on not to respond to Jim's incessant monologues. Forcing his private negotiations with appliances and vehicles into conversations constituted an assault on his dignity, he'd once told her. Most of the time his words just sort of flew around the house, filling up space. They reminded her of the low hiss that her parent's living room radiator used to let off; it meant there'd be warm air filling the room in no time. She'd come to depend on his talkativeness. Told him it was like a reliable sounding device. Always knew where he was and where he wasn't.

Growing up, Jim had learned that silence existed only as an act of cruelty, a whole series of tactics for interfamilial warfare; to be silenced, to get the silent treatment, to go through dinner in deadening silence. It had been important to learn counterattacks, leaving the radio on low, thinking aloud, carrying on lengthy conversations with the dog, talking to inanimate objects. A few months into their second year of marriage, Shelia had told him good and clear that she thought a fair dose of silence never hurt anybody and she didn't ever intend to use it as a weapon against him but if he was gonna keep taking every ounce of quiet that ever fell on the house before bedtime as the start of the

Second Cold War, he'd just have to take on the responsibility for keeping things goin' himself, 'cause she didn't have the energy for such nonsense. He'd pretty much risen to the challenge till the day he died.

"Sorry. You'll have to stay right here till you get dried off," Shelia told Floyd, exhaling a damp stench that seemed to fill the whole utility room. She pulled her drenched sweatshirt and jeans away from her sticky skin and threw them in the drier with an air of deliberateness, as if intentionally getting soaked on a Tuesday morning were a regular occurrence. The wet bra and underwear stayed. She wasn't the type to think of running upstairs stark naked.

At the top of the stairs, the window she had worried over stood decidedly shut. Great. One less place to dry out. Now, get a shower and get the house straightened up by 11:00, she told herself, glancing at the digital clock in the bedroom. She recited, almost chanted this goal while giving her body a good going over in the full length mirror. "Well, you're all here," she declared authoritatively after a few seconds. There had been more than a few shaky times over the past year. It never hurt to reassure herself right out loud.

Through all of February and several weeks in March she had worked hard at trying to feel the weight of herself. The first few weeks this had meant big hefty meals of things like lamb chops and mashed potatoes. Later she took to eating several bags of Mint Milanos with a quart of ice cream in bed and, first thing in the morning, making straight for the sausage biscuit place up the street. She'd hang around there for an hour or so, serving herself second helpings from the breakfast bar. At noon she'd drive her Corona over the McDonald's drive-thru for a double cheeseburger, large fries, and a soft-serve cone. By late March it was trips to Wilson's All-You-Can-Eat Every Night Except Sunday. The only feeling of substantiality she got from the whole thing was a very substantial feeling of queasiness, one that crept all through her like a bad case of motion sickness. Her taut little body was one of the things she'd always had going for her (or so her mother and her best friend Jenny had said), and it couldn't hurt to have it going for her now. Then she worked herself round to realizing that if she could make decisions like this, she was probably going to be okay.

About May, she started to find her weight in her feet; heavy, loud steps around the house and, in the late afternoon, to the end of the block and back. It took guts to bring her feet down hard, to hear herself walking from the bedroom down the hall to the bathroom, from the foyer to the back den, marking the house with the sounds of where she'd been, what she'd done. She could do everything with this kind of boldness—put away the dishes, watch TV, let the dog in and out. Everything on high volume, all spring and most of the summer. The problem was figuring out what really needed doing anymore. Well, the

basics. The simple truth was that there didn't seem to be an overabundance of basics that needed tending to right at the moment. Or, there seemed to be an overwhelming abundance of them, no end in sight.

Her sister Liza came to visit for a week in early August and lingered three days longer than she'd initially planned. Liza was the only person who could have gotten away with verbally noting what Shelia was up to. "If you're gonna march and stomp around the house like a damn majorette, why don't you put on some music?" she blurted out one morning while they were cleaning up from breakfast. She started over, a little more gently. "I'm sorry. But you know you're really starting to get to me with all this heavy weight business. Listen, nobody's gonna tell you what to do anymore. We all just want to see you happy. This is a great house. Well, it *was* a great house. But it's a little big now for a twenty-eight year old woman with no kids, don't you think?"

She waited to see if Shelia would respond. Shelia was holding a plate that had gone through the dishwasher without being rinsed off. She seemed to be totally absorbed in the project of scraping off some food baked onto a pink flower in the center of the pattern.

"I guess what I want to say is have you ever considered getting a smaller place, a two-bedroom, maybe?" Liza blurted out in one long breath. "I'm sure Bob and I could help you find one closer to us. You won't want this much to take care of anyway when you start back to teaching."

Her own damn sister. Didn't Liza realize how little this whole thing had to do with square feet, numbers of rooms, proximity to God-knows-what? How the hell was she supposed to know where she was in another house? But all she managed to get out was "I'll think about it."

Maybe that stench wasn't the dog after all, Shelia thought, vigorously rubbing her wet head with a towel.

"A dead skunk roasting over an open fire," Jim had said one morning as she stepped out of the shower the day after a fresh permanent. "Who was it convinced you that there was something wrong with your straight hair? It's not like I mind the curls. It's just that I never think we're gonna survive the four days of chemical warfare." He swept her up from behind, stuck his face in her wet hair, and pretended to suffocate from the fumes.

She quickly finished dressing, made the bed, straightened the room. By 11:00 the whole downstairs had been vacuumed, two loads of laundry folded and the morning paper scanned. Just have at it with all you've got, she coached herself, wondering when she had taken to thinking in such combative terms.

Ellie was coming for lunch at noon. The Copy Shoppe had given

her the afternoon off in exchange for several late nights she'd worked during the midterm crunch. It had been two solid weeks of students dashing in and out of the shop, big circles under their eyes, ready to cry or scream at anyone who ticked away precious seconds from their deadlines, demanding immediate copies of papers and last year's exams till all hours of the morning. Mr. Emmett Person, the manager, said Ellie had handled the whole thing quite well. She had held her temper better than anyone else on his staff, had even managed to salvage a few crisis situations, and she deserved a half-day off. Paid, no less. Shelia felt a little pressured at having Ellie spend part of this hard-earned time with her. It seemed impossible to gauge what kind of company she was for anybody on any given day.

"*I'm a steamroller baby. I'm gonna roll over you,*" James Taylor was singing when Ellie knocked on the back door. Since when did Eleanor Roberson ever knock?

"Come on in. I'm in the kitchen," Shelia yelled over the stereo. She was busy sprinkling paprika over a dozen deviled eggs. The rain had stopped, and several of the downstairs windows stood open, letting in the autumn air.

"Looks good," Ellie said, plopping down a potted yellow chrysanthemum with matching yellow bow on the counter. "Hey, ever wonder what in the world a paprika is?" she asked in her this is going to be fun voice.

"Quite honestly? No. As far as I'm concerned, it's what you put on deviled eggs. I can't think of one other thing I've ever used it for."

"Oh," Ellie mumbled, clearly a bit deflated. "What do you think?" she asked, turning the bright yellow plant around once to show off all its buds. "I thought it might look great on that little white coffee table in the sun room."

"That's real sweet of you, El. You sure didn't need to be bringing me anything," she said a bit defensively. "But it'll look real nice right here in the kitchen." Why was it all her responses came out so flat?

"Hey, you do like chicken salad, don't you?" she tried again, forcing some perk into her voice. "I tried a new recipe that Liza fixed when she was here. Only Liza could come up with a chicken salad recipe that calls for grapes. No kidding, they go right in there with the mayonnaise—whole. Of course you use the seedless kind. It's real good."

"Sounds great," Ellie answered absently. Her thoughts were buried in the tote bag she was rummaging through. After a few seconds, she resurfaced with an assortment of papers, a package of photographs from the Labor Day weekend, and a pair of paperback books. "I cut out a few articles I thought might interest you," she announced, flipping through the set of stapled sheets that had emerged

from what looked like an endless chaos of clippings.

I've already got two grandmothers clipping every second article from every woman's magazine in the country, all of which are, at this very moment, piling up in the magazine rack, probably creating some sort of fire hazard, Shelia wanted to protest. She tried to look interested and appreciative. One was an article on re-entering the work force, the other on learning to handle your own finances. Okay, so Ellie was thinking of her. Had being thought of always been so exhausting?

"These are two of the greatest books I've read all year," Ellie declared. "What with all this rainy weather we've been having, I thought," she hesitated nervously, "Not that you don't have your work cut out for you. Anyway, they made great late-night reading." Not surprisingly, they were both mystery novels. Ellie rarely ventured beyond a fast-paced mystery.

"Thanks," Shelia said, pretending to study each jacket thoroughly, smiling as if a quote from some newspaper reviewer struck her as especially promising. The buzzer went off on the toaster oven. "That takes care of the rolls. I guess everything is ready. Let's eat," she boomed. She was surprised by her own voice. It came out so loud and sounded so silly, so much like a kindergarten teacher.

Through much of lunch, Shelia humored Ellie by feigning interest in the photographs of their Labor Day trip to Nags Head. Nelson had had this great idea; he and Ellie would find a rental place big enough for anyone from either of their families to join them. It had been a huge success. A total of twenty-four Robersons and Luberts had spent four oceanfront days together, catering to grandparents and watching cousins (most of whom were too young to know what this was all about) race up and down the beach. Though Nelson and Ellie had no children of their own, they were surrounded in every picture by scads and oodles of nieces and nephews who, Shelia thought, looked remarkable the same. Shelia made a big to do over each individual family member, over the house they'd found, over the wonderful weather they'd had.

It wasn't so much that Shelia wanted to be left alone. Being alone was only mildly less straining than visits like this. What she wanted was an easy presence. A relief from the endless rehearsal of things said and done, things not said or not done. Hell, that's how it used to be with Ellie. They'd walk their dogs around the neighborhood and talk about next to nothing for hours. What was it with all of this camp counselor stuff lately? Nothing but projects and preplanned conversations rushing at her from all sides.

Ellie stayed until nearly 3:30. As they walked out to her car, Shelia tried to read her face to see whether she thought the visit had been a complete failure. The last thing Shelia needed to do was put a good

friend—one of the best she had—at arm's length. She felt responsible for Ellie's anxiety and quite expected her to say something like let me know what you think of the books, or some other version of the see you when I see you parting. But she didn't. She just said, more calmly than anything she'd said all afternoon, "How about I give you a call in the morning."

No use rehashing the entire afternoon scene-by-scene, berating herself for acting like somebody who felt suffocated. That was how she had felt. Not many suffocating people handle themselves so politely, she reasoned, flipping TV channels with the remote control. She lay limp, half dazed, through six reruns of the *My Three Sons* and *Leave It to Beaver* variety. When she found *Jeopardy!* on channel 2, she moved from the sofa to the floor and planted herself cross-legged in front of the screen. A contestant from Lansing, Michigan was just choosing WORDS THAT BEGIN AND END WITH THE LETTER "A":

A Philippine plant: (buzz)

What is abaca?

Never heard of it.

Place near Jerusalem purchased with the bribe Judas took for betraying Jesus: (buzz)

What is Aceldama?

I thought Judas committed suicide. What was he doing in real estate?

An ancient district in Southern Greece, on the Gulf of Corinth: (buzz)

What is Achaea?

Guess I don't know my ancient geography.

A list, plan, outline or the like:

What is an agenda? (buzz) Okay, got one.

European leguminous plant: (buzz)

What is alfalfa?

Not fair. I don't even know what leguminous means.

She played along for half an hour on channel 2 and, when the half hour was up, flipped the remote to find the same program just beginning again on another station. She battled it out in fits and starts for a while, then just let the words wash over her.

A pungent, suffocating, gaseous compound: What is ammonia? A title of honor and affection given to God in the New Testament: What is Abba? Spiritual torpor, ennui: What is acedia? A subtly pervasive quality seen as emanating from a person, place, or thing: What is an aura? The first of anything, the beginning: What is alpha?

It came to her in bed. Wide awake again at 1:45. She had placed

herself squarely in the center of their big four-poster; a capital X marking the entire mattress — her size 10 feet reaching to fill out the bottom corners of the bed, her hands tightly grasping the headboard. For hours she had been breathing long and loud, laboring to fill up the silence.

At a point of utter exhaustion, she gave up and started to breathe normally. Her fingers released the headboard; her legs relaxed into a drifting calm. She felt her head, her shoulders, her buttocks, her calves, her heels, sink into the bed. She gave Jim up. He'd just have to rest easy cause she'd had enough of this fighting.

And then she heard it: the sound of a gentle silence.

Janna Adams



John Nilsson Delusions of Grandeur?

On a bench, under the rain,
one man sleeps, and sleeping, dreams
he authors rain and sleet and dewy dawns
but chiefly rain,
 for such his epoch needs;
 it needs the scouring flood,
 the knee-deep, dogged grace
 of rain
to quench the scorching envies of the race,
to drench the moment so the next
 (nascent in the pools of rain)
 may stink and rot and smoulder again.

To rain the water down is hardly more
than thinking rain within him.
And just as the storm could rages
 within the sky that is himself,
So the burning lake and its proud denizens
 burn in him.
He harbors storms and molten seraphim,
 steaming in his rain.

Lucy Hochman

Lydia

After Roger moved out, Lydia found a man at a bar, brought him to her bed, and got pregnant. She'd thought of the last time she'd wanted to die, how she'd stuffed her nose with capers, and decided this was the more responsible thing to do. She lay in bed and her stomach grew to lie next to her. When the baby was born she named it Roger Jr., though the father's name was Adam.

Lydia's sister Margaret had a husband and a gift shop that sold pickles and mustards in rubber lined- jars. Sometimes Lydia worked there. She thought a great deal of the remarks Margaret made as they worked. If Lydia made a mistake, Margaret would say something like "my sister's life is a perpetual puzzle," or "don't mind her, Lydia's continually spellbound."

Lydia told Margaret about Adam one afternoon when the store was empty. She'd been on her stomach in the kitchen that morning to see if her hips still touched the floor and found that they did not. She told Margaret about how it felt to have Adam on top of her moving with his eyes squished shut and his curls bobbing toward the headboard.

"Guess I've still got it, haven't I!" Lydia said.

Margaret pulled a box of little brass animals from under the counter for pricing. "Hell, anyone can have sex. How long 'that other man stay with you? Three weeks?"

"N'uh-uh. Roger stayed four and that's a month."

Roger left without the clothes from the hamper. Lydia had hung them dirty in the big closet, underwear and socks clothespinned to the wire hanger. A closet large enough to spend time in was her first consideration when apartment hunting. She turned around like the spiral post outside a barber shop, smelling thick fibers and tar. She surprised herself, touching the underwear. No washing these. Water reminded her too much of Roger. It had been drizzling outside when they met, her drinking vodka and grenadine at a bar tight as an alley, where Roger came sometimes but not often. She wore a straight corduroy skirt, low heeled shoes, and her hair fringed around her shoulders, staticky near the shallow V of her sweater. Tiny silver moons hung from her pierced ears and shivered.

"Why are you here?" he'd asked. "Meeting someone?"

"Well, *someone*, I sure hope. That's what these places are for."

"Would you like another of those drinks?"

"No, this fellow's been skimping on the cherry all afternoon."

He smiled and said, "So, tell me something about you."

"Well for me, life is a perpetual puzzle." He looked as if he'd hear more, so she kept on, making things up as she went. "Like it's full of ins and outs where a person could become mightily confused."

"How's that?"

"I'm not sure yet. I haven't been very many places." He listened. It was like milk coating her body's insides.

She asked for a ride home. In the car he explained about the tar-prints on the door and vinyl seat, said he worked with roads, nothing he could do. He tapped his thumb on his thigh. She wondered why he was nervous, but was glad. He walked her upstairs, took the hat from his head, and shook it before kissing her just inside the front door.

"You can take your clothes off here," she said. Roger held his hat with all ten fingers and shifted them around its rim. "Or don't you want to?"

"Only if you want me to."

"Well sure I want you to. That's why I mentioned it." So they left their clothes at the front door and Lydia found that she agreed with people who said sex was a glimpse of Heaven. Soon Roger moved in, because Lydia had so particularly chosen this apartment. She hadn't told him about the closet business before he moved in, or the way she ate mostly lettuce. But she owned a color television with remote, an "out on her own now" gift from Margaret for having moved out of her father's house. Things were progressing.

Roger's head on the pillow next to her, his ruddy face and broad forehead, she had taught him to use sunscreen and he had stayed, his body soft and big. With Adam, opening her eyes to his head in the morning, there had been a vague wonder at what it was doing there, all custard colored, and then only relief at knowing that when he left, all she needed of him would stay.

Lydia confessed to Margaret that she was not finally eating right.

"What, have you got water on the brain? You like sex so much?"

"Yes I like it so much. It's like Adam and Eve, only I'm Lydia."

"That man's no kind of Adam to leave some baby no father."

"I don't imagine he knows."

After the baby, Lydia visited Margaret on Tuesdays, rather than working weekends. The baby slept or whined in the gingham playpen and Margaret looked at it. Lydia sat at the register counter and wrote label stickers. Roger Jr. was fat and blonde like an angel.

"How old's that baby now?" Margaret asked each week and answered herself. "Eight weeks? That right?"

"Uh-huh, and getting fatter."

Roger used to say he had never known a woman to lie in bed so late. He would dress in the doorway to the bathroom with her lying on the far side of the bed, watching over his space with a dreamy smile and thin hands between her pillow and cheek. He would make his own coffee and walk with it room to room.

He was a patient person to have around. He moved slowly and tried to keep things clean. Lydia wanted to have hot food for him when he came home, but it usually didn't work out. The grocer was out of what she needed or she forgot to turn the oven on. Sometimes when it got extra late Roger would come in the kitchen and try to help and she would shush him. Three days before he left, this happened.

"Lydia," he said, "you ever think to fix something that takes less than all day?"

She kept quiet.

"Now, I don't mean to represent that you're not trying, but sometimes I'd like to just eat, more than to wait for something nice."

"Well, all right," Lydia said. She pulled the roast from the oven. "You can try it like this, but it's awfully red inside."

"I can eat damn cornflakes."

"Well, all right," Lydia said, and pulled them from the cupboard.

"Criminy. Doesn't anything tick you off?" Roger asked. Lydia smiled and kissed his head.

Besides mustards and pickles and small brass animals, Margaret's gift shop also featured wooden ducks with blue dotted neck bows. These were cardboard-thin and Margaret cut them herself from sheets of wood with her husband's jigsaw. They lined a shelf across from the register counter like targets in an arcade shooting gallery. Lydia held Roger Jr.'s hand and pointed his tubby finger at the row. "Bang, bang," she whispered in his ear. "Shoot the duck, Roger." Her breath bounced back at her with a sweet potato smell.

"Nine weeks, now?" Margaret asked. Lydia propped Roger Jr. against the cash register and fed him applesauce. Some dribbled down his chin and she wiped it with her finger, letting him suck it with his gummy mouth. It felt funny, but nice. "What's in your brain?" Margaret said. "Bubble bath? You'll kill that baby, feeding it so." Lydia was finding her times with Margaret less joyful.

Lydia certainly was pretty. She was tiny, with foggy gray eyes and light colored hair that could not be put in a ponytail. All over she was soft like a pussywillow, easy to carry, but too delicate to lift. Her skin bruised at nothing, showing through as a fingernail does, like waxed paper, smudging shapes beneath. Roger said he never would leave her, that he didn't know what she'd do by herself. But he left

anyway, one suitcase, across town, kept his same job. She didn't know where to look past his pillow.

"Ten weeks. Little Roger's leaving his little clothes behind."

"I know," said Lydia. His ears were apricot-sized already, looking as if she could pluck them. "I'm knitting new booties. I feel like a grandmother." Lydia's teeth were small, as though she'd never outgrown her baby ones, and when she smiled they hardly touched. She had begun wearing light pink lip gloss. The color matched the baby's flushed cheeks. Even in the wintertime, baby fat kept him warm.

It became time to take Roger's clothes from the closet. Lydia decided to wash each piece in Woolite and then give them all to the Goodwill on Tuesday morning, before visiting her sister. She plugged the sink of her bedroom and filled it sudsy. She lay a pair of underwear on the water and it floated until she pushed it in its center with an index finger. It billowed outward and then went down, turning a darker blue in the water. She sat on the edge of the tub and counted the second hand on her watch circling one-through-twelve three times. Then she went to rinse, first lifting the garment and washing the leftover soap suds down the drain. She held the underwear up, dripping, about to rinse. It was good to see and smell them clean, and then the baby began to cry. She could hear through to her room, where it slept on Roger's side of the bed, and when it began to cry she carried Roger's dripping underwear with her to pick the baby up. He was fat and doughy and cried harder on touching the wet soapy cloth. How long had it been since she'd picked him up? He seemed heavier, now, and slippery. He stopped crying, but bubbles kept coming out his mouth. Looking at him trying to be sweet and silent and at the underwear in her hands, it became the next time Lydia wanted to die.

Brooke Burling Sandlot Jones

He damn sure struck fear in ya,
spitting lies and breathing hell,
 stalking about the mound,
just waiting for you to crap in your pants,
ready to bring the hot stuff down your ass
the second you turned away;
and he'd do it too,
every time,
as you looked over to say
this time I'll get a piece of it,
he'd go and serve up
some of that wicked shit
that danced and juked
left and down,
hanging on air for a second
then making straight for the dirt,
cutting away
right when you thought you had it nailed
and you'd be left there hanging,
leaning way back,
swatting at flies,
legs flopping about like
some kind of spastic,
tumbling to the ground so hard
your balls would pop from your ears;
and he'd be staring right at you,
grinning,
still cool as fuck.

Joseph de Gernand



Dean Williamson

Love the One You're With

"C'mon, Dennis, your cue. Display awareness. On the ballness. Attention. Otherwise you strand me, abandon me, loose me to uncharted depths. I'm sinking, Dennis."

"What?" he said. "Sorry. I was just, out the window there was the cutest mother and puppy."

She pulled her eyelids back. Theatrical exasperation.

"Your lines. Right. Where are we?" His eyes pleaded with hers. He pressed his hand on his thigh to steady his bouncing leg.

Ariel's eyes rolled to the ceiling. One hand pressed into the flesh at her temple. Her pinky massaged an eyebrow. "It's off, canceled. Ceased. Terminated. Dead."

"C'mon. I'll try. One more time. This could be a juncture. You should go over it again. You have to do it for real in an hour."

"The catalyst, the energizing force, the invigoratingness. It is no longer." She sighed and tapped her cigarette over the ashtray. The ash didn't fall. She tapped harder. The cigarette snapped in half, and the ashtray, full of gray mass, dumped over the table onto Dennis' shoe. "Ah, justice. Allegory for my existence."

Dennis jiggled his toe under the table to remove the pile of ash. He hoped she hadn't noticed. He fumbled in his coat pocket for another cigarette for his girlfriend. She didn't like that term; it made her feel "propertified, labeledized." Dennis offered her a fresh cigarette. He wasn't a smoker, but he lit a match and held it out for Ariel. She placed the filter on her lip and took a drag. She held the tip too far into the fire. The tip burst into flame.

Dennis grabbed the cigarette and tossed it into his glass of wine. It hissed. The man sipping coffee at the table next to them looked into his newspaper. Ariel mentioned something about inevitability and providence as she stood to leave. Dennis struggled in his pocket for money to cover the bill. Plus tip.

Ariel shoveled the scripts into her leather shoulder bag, ran her hand through her hair, and wandered to the door. Dennis skipped up behind her. He was driving her to an audition. Everything needed to go smoothly.

Dennis sat in his office high above the city. Glass squeezed him on two sides. The corner office—one of the perks of being the boss' son. Vice President—Human Resources, the brass plaque announced from the large oak door. The company gave Dennis the responsibility of developing its employees. Of creating the optimal working environment. Personnel and Development had performed tests that definit-

tively implied a significant link between the employee and the employee's environs. It was up to Dennis to exploit that link.

He sat and looked over the vast expanse of his uncluttered mahogany desk. He felt a desire to disrupt the neatness. There was a phone and a fountain pen set that he rarely used. He couldn't keep the ink off his shirts. There were no papers, no reports.

His calendar was mostly uninterrupted white. There was lunch today with his mother. She'd call him to remind him to be on time. Dennis tapped the lacquered mahogany with both forefingers. What to do until then. He leaned forward and pulled open a drawer under the desk. He invested in a tool of sorts to pull him through these daily doldrums. The box-like device had a wooden frame from which hung three silver balls suspended by thin twine. The balls were to be swung into one another. The resulting collision sent the balls in opposite directions. They returned to crash into one another with a crisp snap, and continued to do so until gravity and the trauma of the wrecks sapped their energy. They hung quietly until Dennis invigorated them.

The speaker on Dennis' phone crackled. "Ms. Steadman requests your presence for lunch." The deep, bureaucratic voice of Dennis' secretary. He stopped the crackling balls in mid-flight.

Ms. Steadman sucked on her cigarette, her thin lips wrinkled with concentration. She and Dennis sat opposite one another at lunch. The dishes had been cleared. Dennis pecked at a cup of coffee. His mother drank scotch. Beethoven's Ninth symphony pounded overhead. Ode to Joy.

"The compatibility reports for September," she said.

Dennis searched his mother's eyes for the meaning of her words. He found a hard, gray glaze. "Uh, do you mean, are they ready?"

She sighed, closed her eyes. A slight nod as she exhaled a wonderful streak of warm smoke. "Well, the data is incomplete as yet." He tried to sound confident. Beethoven rose to a false climax and subsided.

"Dennis. How am I supposed to toughen you for the pressures of my job? You'll have to take over one day." Her brow smoothed at the thought but quickly resumed its tension.

"Well. I suppose—"

"It was rhetorical," she snapped, eyes narrowing. She gulped at the cigarette. "You've been corporate for two years. I don't see the drive yet. The need to win. You must focus, Dennis. You must be ruthless." She held the cigarette between two fingers and thrust it at Dennis for emphasis. The strings in Beethoven thrust with her.

Dennis ran his finger around the rim of the coffee cup. He didn't feel the steam. He locked his eyes on his finger as it moved.

"I don't get it, Dennis. Isn't the money enough? You're paid

better than most. I would think," she paused to sip some scotch. Her eyebrows lifted a fraction as she swallowed. "I would think that you would have what it takes. You can't make it without the hunger. How do you think I made it?"

An image of his mother, naked beneath an old, flabby male in a three-piece suit flashed on the tablecloth. He said nothing.

"It's hard work. Determination. Not lazy, sit-on-your-ass who cares." She stopped to look for a sign that he understood. "Is it that girl, that actress you're living with? Is she confusing your thoughts with a lot of sensitivity drivel? Probably busted your balls by now."

"Don't, Mother." He hissed but didn't look at her eyes. Beethoven was climbing. "Ariel knows me. Real well. Better than most people." He still didn't look at her. He didn't want to hear how he had wasted a whole year of valuable work experience on an actress. And a minority at that. He'd told his mother that Ariel was a dark Venezuelan. Beethoven fell away for a moment. Ariel was black. His mother's lips parted and a gray jet rushed past. The cloud expanded at Dennis' face. He looked away.

"Whatever you do down in that filth-hole of an apartment you share is your business. And I mean that. I want to know nothing. But when you come downtown, you're mine. You owe me and the firm all you have. I sign the checks. You work for me. Is that clear?"

Dennis watched her, his lips twitched. Beethoven rushed forward. He bit his cheek to keep quiet. It was his job. "Bitch," he thought, wringing his napkin under the table. He sipped at the coffee. It was cool.

"Let's not fight," she said as she leaned forward and crushed the cigarette butt in the ashtray. She smiled smugly. Beethoven climaxed.

"Hello, Dad." Dennis smiled. There was his father in the market.

"Dennis!" How are you?" His father's voice chirped, always lifting when he spoke with his only son.

"Fine. What's for dinner?" Dennis asked. The two stood in front of the lettuce and tofu. Dennis' basket was empty; his father's bulged.

"Doing my famous shrimp and veggies. We're going to a show tonight, so I need to do the quickie." He laughed. Dennis' father worked as an accountant in a small firm a few blocks away from the market and home. Ms. Steadman usually worked late and hated being troubled by insignificant chores. So Dennis' father did the shopping and cooking. He called it his creative outlet.

"How's Ariel?" he asked Dennis. He enjoyed Ariel because she was so different. So not a part of his life.

"Great," Dennis said thickly. He sighed. Silence rushed in between them. The two men tried not to look away from one another.

Dennis broke the awkward calm. "It's getting late. I'll let you run do dinner. I know how she gets when it's behind schedule." He put on a weak smile.

"Yeah," his father said with a quiet chuckle. "She's just like that, isn't she?"

"Spirits. I crave the intoxicator." Ariel lay on her back, naked beneath the sheet. She stared at the ceiling with her eyes closed, her left arm flapping in the direction of the kitchen.

Dennis rose from her side and pulled on a robe. He shuffled to the kitchen, poured a glass of cherry brandy and padded back to the bed. He sat on its edge. Ariel took the glass and downed it. A picture of Ms. Steadman guarded the night-table next to Dennis. She was not amused.

"So, anyway, like I was saying. I've got this big project at work that she wants finished by next Friday. I don't know where I can come up with the data in that time. No way I can do it. She loves to watch us squirm and beg—"

Ariel's hand flashed up. A motion for silence.

Dennis didn't catch the signal. He went on. "She has no right. She doesn't own me. All she does is sign the check—"

Ariel sighed loudly, interrupting. Her forehead wrinkled. "I beg, nay, implore you. Terminate. I yearn for tranquillity, self peace of mind. I'm muddled. Note mine trembling labia. Or is it labium?"

"Ariel, I come to you now with real problems. Real big problems."

She rolled onto her side and faced him. Her startling cleavage emerged from the sheet. "Ah, but 'tis my predicament, too, my annoyance. Your plights litter my existence as your own." She placed her hand on Dennis' knee. "Shall we disburden one another?" She whipped the sheet into a ball and tossed it to the floor. She patted the bed where she meant him to join her.

Dennis shrugged off his robe and rolled onto the bed. She crawled to him. "Hosiery," she moaned as she reached him. Dennis glanced down. Damn socks. He flung them off. And assumed his position. She smiled with expectation. Dennis smirked at his mother's picture. She crawled on top of him.

Dennis slouched in the high-backed chair behind his desk. The office was silent. He wrapped his hands around his shins and pulled his knees to his chin. The sleeves of his suit protested the movement but yielded. A twenty-eight year old executive. A high power job. A fetal hug.

Paper and files and things now cluttered his desk. He stared nervously at the paycheck poised on top of a pile of unread personnel

files. There was a note attached to the check: "Keep up the work." It was signed "Ms. Steadman." A threat? He depended on those checks, especially with Ariel between roles. He needed to impress Ms. Steadman.

Just to the left of the check in a crumpled heap was one of Ariel's bras. Soft white silk with the slow buttons in front. He stared at it and thought of the way her brown hair dangled, hovering above him when they made love. There was a note from Ariel, too: "Be home 8:00. Prepare to fulfill me." Dennis smiled. He watched as Ariel rocked back and forth above him, moisture gathering on her forehead. Her eyes closed in concentration, her mouth open in anticipation. He liked the way she rolled off him and slept under his arm when she finished.

Sharp, cramping pain in Dennis' wrists pulled him back to his office. He relaxed his hands, but remained curled in the chair. He exhaled slowly as his gaze shifted from paycheck to bra. Bra to paycheck. Back again.

His head collapsed against the slick leather of the chair. Fatigue. He stared across the room. His glance rested on a bookcase. His favorite paperweight—a brass turtle—was flipped over on its back. Legs flailing.

Bryan Morgan

Shark Attack

surrounded by the futile few
whose expressions make your day
you beat the drum harder, hitting
the center and watching the
waves spring forth splashing
and sucking at their feet
thinking "ah, this is the play!"
but before you can fix the gist
they're already at you, tearing
ripping from your arm from
your hand of God and from the
chest that once held your clopping
heart—paddling in your own
blood no longer blue liquid
enters your orifice and self-
consumption pumps and pumps
through to your missing feet
link to your world from before
and the sinking begins in a
major fashion, unsuitable
flowing and you flow too like
you were born to it the
hiding of your talent only wrongs
you never aids the seeking thing
and the music of your drowning
is the thing never before heard
akin to the child-cry and the twig-
rubbing and all the crossing back
and forth, the sound-making
you always last longed for until now
the sight goes and the blue-green black
eats you faster and the flesh pecked
away leaving you there alone, truly so
witness this: your the frozen flash of the
underwater photoman, waiting for
something like an albatross the
one to reach down and scoop
you up in time to the music
and sail again softly to the
land of diatoms and short men
where long pecking orders petered out ago

Ed Goodman

RED CARDINALS ON THE LawN

The red cardinals knew when it was time to eat. The sun was setting. They hopped around on the green grass and split the seeds with their beaks. I watched them fly up into the trees as the Dog approached. And, of course, after the dog was gone, all the red cardinal birds flew back down to the lawn. Every now and then, a non-cardinal bird would try to get in on the seeds. But the red cardinals would always chase the outsider away. They were oblivious to all else. I looked over at the bag of bird feed. "I'll have to get some more," I thought. The bag was almost empty.

The next day in writing class...

"Your Marxist views shine through brightly here. I love the revolutionary undertones. Is it about South America? I love the symbolism. The setting sun, as if time were running out. And the twist ending when we find out that the narrator had been feeding them all along, sort of a play on the "biting the hand that feeds" motif. I love social commentary such as this. The masses just eat and eat, they don't care about anything else. And when the dog approaches, it's capitalized, but after it's gone, it's insignificant and, therefore, in the lower case letters—

"That was a typo—"

"An obvious symbol of tyranny. This really worked for me."

"Oh, but the sexual symbols were much more exciting than that. All the red, the lust, I got excited just reading it. And the sun, which represents the first sexual experience—or is that the maternal figure—anyway, it's big and round and warm like a breast. And did anybody else notice how the word "lawn" is treated in the title? The submissive "a" and "w" are wedged in between the domineering "L" and "N"—

"My 'caps lock' button is—"

"Definite sado-masochistic messages there. Uhah! And he discovers that his bag of seeds is almost empty! WHAT AN IMAGE! And the birds crack the seeds open with their beaks! Mmmuh! It's so brash and bold! So natural, yet, so sick! Huhu! Beaks and seeds! Brilliant!"

"It's only—"

"I think you people are missing the point of this story. It's a commentary on bigotry and race relation. Did you notice that the cardinals are all the same color, red, and they run off the other birds, who are not red. The grass is green. The red birds stand on the green grass. It's so cleverly disguised, it took me a couple of readings to get it. The birds are whites. They stand on and oppress the grass, which

represents all the people of color."

"Well, I don't see how all of you missed what this piece is really about—"

"Birds?"

"It's about the horrible men of the world trodding all over the women. The red cardinals are male. They eat as much food, as they want. But the female cardinals are kept from the food. They are run off by the males—"

"Actually, the red cardinals run off all the non-cardinals. Had you read—"

"That's even worse! Females are excluded all together. Look at our own history. George Washington, male. Theodore Roosevelt, male. Martin Luther King, male. All we see are the males, the females do not exist. And every time the males are threatened by something, where do they seek refuge? In the trees, that is, behind their penises. It's a very chauvinistic description. I'm going to write somebody an angry letter about this and then I'm going to write a poem about guns."

"Well, I can understand why you all misunderstood this, since none of you are Catholic, but I am. And this thing is chock-full of anti-Catholic imagery. The red cardinals? They represent the papacy. The dog comes along and scares them off. The dog would be a big issue, say, abortion. It's the Great Hound of Abortion. But, and here's a slam, the cardinals run and hide from the issue. When the issue is gone, they come back...TO EAT! This is saying that all the papacy does is feed itself and avoid the issues. I demand an apology."

The class turns and looks at the author of "Red Cardinals on the LawN," who then eats his copy of the story.

Three Hundred Years Later at some "hot" college...

Professor Biscuit steps on stage to deliver his speech on Goodman's "RED CARDINALS ON THE LawN":

"Good afternoon. One correction to the agenda—the Goodman Red Cardinal Scholarship will be awarded tomorrow after the Goodman is God ceremony. Please make a note of that."

"Now, I'm very glad to see so many of the country's top scholars here today for the 82nd annual Goodmanfest. I hope you are all seated comfortably—this could take a while. I will be drawing from my 28 volume work, *Goodman's Cardinals: Offensive Social Criticism or Defensive Political Satire?* Today, I will be speaking about many aspects of what we all know is the single most important work of the 21st century. In less than a page, Goodman takes us through an extraordinary history of not only the evolving materialism and heightened political awareness of the day, but also the rise of the modern East and the deterioration of the West as a political force, all the while considering the dichotomy of man as exemplified in the microcosm that was

Goodman's back yard. It's clean, it's fresh, it's bold, and, most important, it's seemingly meaningless. One must pay especially close attention to the semiotics of the sexual body, the deep socio-economic and religious messages, and, of course, the evocation of a paradigmatic Freudian family romance. We have evidence that at the time of composition Goodman's family was in town. The multiple typologies of the plight of the farmer and migrant worker prove Goodman's obsession with his great grandmother. Add to this that Goodman was probably doing all the popular drugs of the day and he was undergoing psychological therapy for a rather hard break-up with his third girlfriend, and you have a rather meaty bit of work.

"The boy genius was ostensibly capable of great things, but he went on to starve to death in the streets of New York. At the time of his death, he had written 30 full-length novels, 487 complete short stories, and 3 volumes of poetry. He had just completed a dissertation proving the existence of water but nothing else he did even begins to touch his ubiquitous masterpiece "Red Cardinals." Indeed, the critics hated everything else he did. We just do not get works of this quality anymore. Now, as a rather learned and pompous man, I've studied Dante, Virgil, Shakespeare, Faulkner, all the great works of literature. However, I've yet to come across a work that says as much, as clearly, in as little space, as does Goodman's "RED CARDINALS ON THE LawN." All this in a ten line paragraph that the twenty-two-year-old literary god called "Just a stupid little piece of description about these damned birds that I fed once in a while..."

Laurie Goldman

My hands are small

not petite like some
with slender rods
warning
preparing the hand
for its next encounter.

My hands are a child's.
Adorably squat
and rotund fingers like worn down
crayons or sidewalk chalk
wrapped around the handlebars of banana bikes
exposing white knuckles and dimples,
my hands were made to dig or grab or clench
wave spastically, fingers opening
then slapping my thick palm
as I flatten my nose against the
window of the car
leaving the dirt and the sticks
and the swingsets
so simple to squeeze and grasp
clap-swish clear the dust away
wash up for dinner
and wipe them on each other.

Lori Brudner

Metamorphosis

When we were young,
We would hunt through the fields
for berries.
We'd gather them
In reed baskets
And sit by the river
Eating like wolves
Till our chins
Dripped blue
And our stomachs ached.
Without a clue or care
As to why or where
We were,
We spent each day,
Arms locked,
Running with the stream,
Babbling in a tongue
Only we understood.

We stand a little taller now,
And we learn to weave
Leaves into loincloths.
My hair
Covers my breasts.
I reach out my hand,
But you slap it away
And scamper into the bushes.
I can see your eyes between the leaves—
Mountain amber—
Moving only when I do.

The sun sets and rises,
And with the new star,
You come out.
You walk towards me slowly;
The breeze plays tricks
With your hair
As the infant sun
Glitters yellow
In your eyes.
You extend your arm,
And the muscles shudder
In symphonic precision
With the shivers
Through my spine.
We sit on the banks of the river,
Dragging our toes
In the current.
I reach over
And take a berry.
I place it on your tongue,
Wiping the blue juice
From your chin.

Courtney Smith

Worthwhile

There are days spent
hating cooking
wondering what to fix
for dinner.

Always
there is time
after setting out plates
glasses
knives forks spoons
and napkins
to rest elbows on the counter,
rock heel to ball,
 heel to ball,
waiting for the microwave
to finish,
watching you slice tomatoes,
 peel cucumbers,
stopping the knife precisely at your thumb.
You advised me to move the blade
away from my hand—
better yet,
to make a habit of cutting boards.

I remember once
watching you across the counter
shredding lettuce.
Daddy stood behind you
as if to make the salad happen faster,
peering over arms folded neatly into his chest.
I was dream-talking about college or career or marriage
and I said I could not imagine
just being at home.
I would have to do more
than nurse kids
and feed a husband
and clean house.

Your tears dripped on the lettuce
and I worried about your thumb
slipping
and I could not make you believe
that I thought
you were
worthwhile.

Courtney Smith

God

Hidden inside
the tangible daylight
of early morning
there is something
which cannot be perceived
even
at noon
when
shredded shrouds of mist
have been folded back
by aggressive sunlight
exploding
on windowpanes
and piercing
the alert and searching
gazes
of passersby.

Anna Snowdon



11 - 2 | A

J. D. Humphreys

Milenberg Joys

April came in without knocking. It had rained all evening, and as she stood in the doorway, rain blew onto the floor of the apartment and dripped from the brim of her hat and the sleeves of her coat.

"Hello, Doll," she said. "Just stopped by."

I was sitting at my desk. I closed the book I was reading without marking the place.

"It's awful out," she said. "Can't believe how wet I am." She stood at the door dripping rain at her feet. Her hair hung out the back of her hat.

"Shut the door," I said. "Where've you been?"

"Mostly walking. There's an awful lot of water. Almost lost a shoe."

"What happened at Francis and Robert's?"

"Some party. More like a morgue. I thought I'd stop by. Thought we'd go dancing."

April's coat was unbuttoned. Her hat was turned up on one side. Her face was flushed and the high color ran across the top of her cheeks and the bridge of her nose and the lids of her eyes.

"Come on," she said. "Thought we'd go dancing."

"Not tonight."

"What do you say? We'll go to the Sunset."

"Not tonight. Sit down."

"Really. We'll go to the Sunset. They've got a band. Somebody Hines and something. We'll get Jack Roses and dance."

"I don't think so."

"You can't stay here all the time."

April looked at me and laughed, her top row of teeth showing small and childlike.

"You're drunk," I said.

"Not yet."

"Come on. Sit down. Take off your coat."

"Oh really."

April took off her coat and threw it on the sofa. She dropped her purse on the floor. She took off her hat and threw it on top of her coat. Then she sat down.

"Awfully rotten night," she said.

"I'll put on some water," I said. "I'll make some tea."

April looked at the floor between her feet, hair hanging to the side, bangs bending over her eyes. Rain dripped from her hair and ran down the curve of her neck. When I looked at her, my chest tightened.

"Frank," she said. "It's been a rotten night. Everything's been rotten."

April sat on the edge of the sofa with her legs crossed at the ankles. We sat and looked at each other and drank our tea.

"Your hair's still wet," I said.

"It's a mess."

"You're dripping all over yourself."

"What's the difference?"

April wore her hair high on the back of her head, lighter near the top and darker near the ends from the rain. She reached back and took down her hair and shook it so that it fanned out straight and long just above her shoulder blades.

"I'm a rotten mess," she said.

"How was Francis and Robert's?"

"Mostly boring."

"What happened?"

"I don't know. Nothing really. Mostly made Roys."

"How's Robert?"

"He made the Roys. Awfully good Roys, too."

"They let him do the drinks?"

"Mostly. Up to the end."

"I don't suppose you could've stopped him."

"Hardly. Francis knocked off after the first two. By the fire-place."

"Always Francis."

"They got tired of Roys. Too much lemon. Something like that. Wanted to play croquet."

"Wasn't it raining?"

"Robert said it'd be more fun. More exciting, he said."

April held her cup to her mouth. Her lips were thin and she parted them to blow on her tea. She'd stopped wearing lipstick. Sitting across from her, I could see a raw place where she'd bitten away the skin.

"Where's Patrick?" I said.

"I don't know. Left about an hour ago."

"Shouldn't he be back?"

"I doubt it. Went to get swizzle sticks. With what's-her-name. With Louise."

"Why'd they want swizzle sticks?"

"I don't know. Robert wanted them. Ran out, I guess."

"You should've used spoons."

"Said he'd stir with his tongue if he didn't have swizzle sticks. He was soured. Had to have swizzle sticks."

"That's kind of rotten," I said.

"What do you mean?"

"Patrick going off like that. With Louise."

"Louise? What's the difference?"

April took her cup to the kitchen. I heard her run water from the tap and then pour something into the sink. She came back in with her necklace in her mouth.

"Wonderful tea," she said.

She took her hair in both hands and pulled it off her neck and let it fall back again.

"I feel rotten," she said. "I'm drunk. I'm soused. Let's dance."

"Sit down," I said. "Let's talk."

April went to the oakwood cabinet next to the desk. She bent over and began picking up and putting down records. As she bent over, I looked at her outline and saw the smooth line of her waist and hip and thigh and calf.

"Come on," she said. "Let's dance."

April had put on "Milenberg Joys." We danced to it in the middle of the living room. Then she played "Nobody's Sweetheart." Then "Me and My Shadow." April danced off to one side, out of reach. Her hair bounced up and down in wet clumps and her dress clung to her calves. She put on "Someday Sweetheart," a slow song, good for dancing.

"Come on," she said. "Let's go."

"We'd better not," I said.

"Really. Come on."

I looked at her standing there out of breath with her face flushed and her hair just above her shoulder blades.

"I don't think it's a good idea," I said.

"Come on."

I went over and took off the record. It was a swell song and I felt bad about taking it off.

"It's late," I said. "We'd better get you home."

"Patrick's got the car," she said. "He and what's-her-name. Louise."

"I can call a cab."

"He's got the keys."

"When's he supposed to be back?"

"I don't know. Didn't ask."

"Maybe he told Robert."

"I doubt it. Doubt he'll be back. Don't want to see him anyway. Not tonight."

April picked up her coat from the sofa and hung it in the coat closet.

"If you want," I said, "you can have the sofa."

"Doubt he'll even notice."

I went into the bedroom to get extra blankets from the closet. I could hear her moving around in the living room.

"Frank," she said. "I'm going to shower."

"Go ahead. There's towels in the bathroom."

She went down the hall and I heard the bathroom door close. The extra blankets were in the top of the closet. I took them down and got a pillow and put everything at the foot of the bed. I sat on the bed next to the blankets, listening to her run water in the bathroom. She ran water into the tub and then turned on the shower. The water came down choppy into the tub. While I listened to the water running in the shower, I thought about April using my washcloth. I thought about her soaping with the soap from the soap dish and I thought about her drying herself with my towel. Then someone knocked at the door to the apartment and I got up to answer it.

Patrick stood in the rain, leaning against the frame of the doorway. His tie hung loose and rain spotted his little round glasses.

"Frank buddy," he said. He stepped into the room.

"Patrick," I said. "What're you doing out?"

"It's really raining," he said. "Rotten raining."

He'd picked up the word rotten and it irritated me to hear him use it.

"We're looking for toothpicks," he said. "Me and Louise. She's out in the car."

"How many do you need?"

I went in the kitchen and took out a box of toothpicks. There were 400 inside and I thought that would last him.

"Here," I said.

"Mostly toothpicks," said Patrick. "And swizzle sticks. Toothpicks and swizzle sticks."

He opened the box and studied the toothpicks.

"No good," he said. "Got to be colored. Louise likes colored ones. They've got to be colored."

"It's all I've got."

Patrick went over to the desk. He looked at the books piled to the side and picked up the top one.

"Frank buddy," he said. "This is good stuff. You're a prince."

He picked up a table of tax rates, opened it, and studied the page, holding it close to his face. There was a lipstick smudge on the left lens of his glasses. In the bathroom, the shower ran.

"Good stuff," he said.

"It's a tax book," I said.

"A tax book. Frank buddy, that's very kind of you."

"How's the party?"

"The party. Great. Just great. Roys for everybody."

Patrick took off his hat and looked at it. Rain ran off the brim onto his topcoat. It was a raglan topcoat and he wore it unbuttoned.

I stood there looking at him.

"Got any swizzle sticks?" he said.

"Sorry."

"Frank buddy, you're a prince."

He put on his hat, a man's felt hat, the same kind April wore. He pulled it to his ears.

"Louise is in the car," he said.

I opened the door and Patrick looked at me.

"We got sidetracked. That's why we're out."

I thought about asking him where April was. I thought it might be a bad idea, but then I asked him.

"Where's April?"

Patrick looked at me. His glasses were fogging from the rain.

"April," he said. "She's still at Robert's. I bet she's waiting at Robert's. They're all knocked."

I stood looking at the lipstick on his glasses. The rain came down in sheets behind him.

"Louise is in the car," he said.

"I guess you'd better get back."

"I guess so."

He walked backwards toward the door holding the box of toothpicks.

"Frank buddy," he said. "You're a prince."

He stepped into the rain and walked toward his car. It was parked at the curb with the motor running and the lights on. The rain made little depressions on the surface of the standing water. Through the rain I could see the tiny figure of Louise in the passenger seat. Patrick got into the car. Louise began to laugh as they drove off.

I decided to build a fire in the fireplace. I wanted to dry things out. I took some wood from the wood box and stacked it onto the grill. There was some old newspaper in the wood box and I used this for kindling. When I'd gotten it started, I moved the grating into place. It was a swell fire, and it felt good sitting in front of it.

April's purse sat on its side against the sofa. An empty lipstick case had spilled onto the floor. It was made of brass and she'd asked me to give it to her four years ago for her twentieth birthday, though she rarely wore makeup. I looked at it for a long time without touching it, but it was no good.

I got up and went toward the bedroom. In the hallway, I stopped and looked at myself in the mirror. Except to shave, I rarely looked at myself, and I thought what a funny thing it was. It seemed such a funny

thing, having so much decided for you like that.

I could hear April drying off and moving around in the bathroom. Then she opened the door just enough to speak through. Steam rose into the hall.

"Frank," she said through the door. "Do you have any soda water?"

"I think so."

"Could you get some?"

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing's the matter. It's for my feet."

"What's wrong with them?"

"Nothing's wrong with them. You're supposed to wash them in soda water. Keeps you from getting veins. I read about it in a magazine."

I got a bottle of soda water and handed it through the door. The fire was burning low and bright. In the bedroom, I took out a pair of pajamas.

"You can put these on," I said.

I pushed them through to the bathroom.

"They're huge," she said.

April laughed through the door and I thought of her top row of teeth, small and childlike.

"I built a fire in the fireplace," I said. "I'm turning in."

I could hear her dressing in front of the bathroom mirror, pulling on my pajamas. In a minute she'd come out wearing them. I went into the bedroom and closed the door.

Without undressing, I shut out the light and sat on the side of the bed. Except for the crack under the door, the room was dark. The rain beat down in waves against the bedroom window. I sat and listened to the rain. Then I heard April open the bathroom door and walk down the hall. After a minute, the crack of light under the door went out.

For a long time I lay on my back and tried to think about nothing at all. I knew I wouldn't sleep and so I tried to think about the rain. Then I tried to think about the songs we'd danced to. I tried to concentrate on McKenzie and Condon's "Nobody's Sweetheart" with its fast clarinet. But after a while I began to think about April. I remembered how after the first time I'd seen her, I couldn't remember what her hair looked like. I went home wondering if it was to the side or brushed back or in bangs, but the next time I saw her I forgot to look. I remembered the time when she'd said laughing that she'd marry me, and how I'd believed her. Then I remembered the first time she'd met Patrick, how they took her car to Northbrook for repairs and how I refused to go but knew I should. I rolled onto my side, but it was no good.

In the living room, the fire had burned to cinders. In the glow I could see April on the sofa. She lay on her side with her hands pressed to her face.

I went into the kitchen and took a glass from the cabinet. On my way back, she lifted her head.

"Frank," she said.

I stopped and looked at her on her side on the sofa. Her face was calm and she held her head steady above the pillow.

"I'm awake," she said.

"I was just getting water."

I pulled a chair to the sofa and sat across from her.

"How's the fire?" I said.

"Good. Nice."

"How're the pajamas?"

"Wonderful. They're too big."

"They look good on you."

I looked at the curve of her chest rising and falling under the blanket.

"It's weird," she said. "Smelling like you. The pajamas, I mean."

April lay quiet on her side with her cheek pressed to the pillow. Her bangs were damp and frizzy against her forehead.

"Patrick came by," I said.

"That's not surprising."

"He came in when you were in the shower."

"What'd he say?"

"He was looking for toothpicks. And swizzle sticks. He kept calling me a prince."

"He and Louise?"

"She was in the car. They were driving around in the rain. It was kind of rotten."

She pushed her hair back from her forehead and held it there.

"What's the difference?" she said.

"He was soused," I said. "They were on their way back to Robert's"

"I doubt it. They'll drive around all night."

"Maybe you shouldn't have let him go with her."

"It wouldn't have mattered."

"Still," I said. "You shouldn't have let him go."

April was quiet and lay on the sofa.

"He's an ass," I said.

She turned onto her back and pulled the blankets to her neck.

"Can't you just stay here?" I said.

"I'd be awful."

"You'd be fine."

"No I wouldn't."

"Really. You'd be fine."

"Frank," she said. "Don't talk about it. You'll ruin it."

I sat and looked at the fire. It was burned to embers, and after a while I couldn't take looking at it.

April slept on her side with her knees pulled to her chest. Her face was pale and her cheeks puffy and her hair flat against her forehead. The lids of her eyes were large and eggshell smooth. She lay there mouthing words, moving her lips but not speaking. Outside, the rain came down hard and steady, blowing in waves.

For a long time I watched April mouthing words. Then she made a small noise and arched her back and was silent. I picked up her lipstick case and held it. Her hair hung in her eyes. I wanted to touch it. I wanted to brush it back. I put my hand near her face and she took it with her fingers and, with her touching me warm and trembling, I couldn't breathe at all.

Laura Paresky



Christine Kemper The Gatherers

The double-arched blade
spun the earth,
 tumbled mud and potatoes
into the light,
into our greedy hands,
 fingers twitching
with the quick reach and drop
of potato into bucket,
 the dirt clotted on our shoes
made us step like old men
our faces smudged with dirt,
our skin itched with drying sweat,
 the August sun red
against the insides of our eyelids,
we squinted through dark strands of hair.

It was labor
 to find the potatoes,
new born, and thin-skinned
in the earth,
 to bend and crouch, stand again
forward a step, half a step,
the wire handle of the bucket
cutting deeper into our young palms,
 while the cool green river
behind arthritic oaks and sycamores
whispered shyly of release.

Joanie Wread

Fable

Frisseca exuded sensitivity. Proud to be a rabbit, she tantalized her listeners with her titillating, syrupy voice, determined to enlighten the world. She crept up behind emotions as they wafted and welled in the hearts of beavers, hedgehogs, porcupines, weasels and other such ordinary, unsophisticated types and whispered windy, wispy insights between the 't' and the 'h' of their thoughts, leading them down paths of exotic wavelengths, giddy heights of discovery, roller coasters of self-realization. Or so she thought. One night while a hedgehog was sleeping, a small pebble wedged itself into his ear. He woke up with a huge headache. As Frisseca passed him that morning, she sensed his pain and stopped to heal him.

"You, hedgehog," she breathed mistily in his fuzzy ear, "are too unemotional. You missss enlightenment by closing off your faculties of experience, missss feeling exposed, relieved, delivered from the even steel of everyday concrete experience. You suppress the truth waiting to be unearthed inside of you.....why you fear, your anger, your sadness..." And at this point, Frisseca burst into tears because the sheer thought of hedgehog's repressed spirit laying helpless in his inadequate framework, his crude body unable to express or even conceive of what he felt, so rippled her spine that she could no longer attempt to dissolve the lump in her throat. As she cried, she imagined that the pain was seeping out of hedgehog's body into her own and then out through her tears, voicing the unvoicable.

Hedgehog scratched his head. He did not feel voiced. He felt as if he had a headache. When Frisseca saw that he was still pained, she briskly ushered him to Ferret, the psychologist. "Hedgehog," said Ferret the psychologist, "this pain stems from a forest-affiliated, psychophiletic-antiditetic-anchronogonality-dependent childhood relationship with your father....." Presently Hedgehog found himself pounding at a couch, picturing his father's fuzzy face on the seat cushion. But when he was finished trying to spit war cries with as much spite as he could muster, his head still hurt. In fact, it hurt more. Hedgehog's inability to truly express himself dulled the marrow in Frisseca's bones; it seemed to suggest that he was not made of flesh and blood, but of cold silicon, a slate of molecules bouncing around, initiating nerve reflexes, devoid of order. Desperate to save him from this meaningless existence, she attuned every quivering nerve, every

ordered, throbbing blood vessel she possessed, to receiving and voicing Hedgehog's pain. She threw herself on the couch, writhing and wriggling in grotesque configurations, and then let out a deafening sob which crawled from her paws to the tips of her ears and finally disappeared, paralyzing her.

The silence was thick. Hedgehog stood aghast. He waved his paw in front of her face, shook Frisseca, but couldn't ignite a spark; she stood white, hollow, echoing, made of stone. Shaking his head in bewilderment, Hedgehog reached up to scratch his ear. In his paw, he retrieved a small pebble. He looked at Frisseca, then at the pebble, and then back at Frisseca. A small tear rolled down his cheek. He did not understand why he was crying, nor why his headache was gone, but somehow he knew that he did not need to. His heart pounding loudly in his chest, he walked over to Frisseca, put the pebble in her hand, and walked quietly away.

Moral:

We need not become anything, we already are something, and yet we would kill ourselves to know what it is.

Laura Carter Ellie

I can see her
out the back window
fingers fumbling gently
in her garden
digging holes
filling them up
The sun has caught her
pinned her down in one spot
next to the marigolds
The watch we gave her last Christmas
is shiny on her wrist
as she gropes for weeds
in the dirt
When we were little
we made mud pies together
close to the road
where there was dust from the cars
She didn't understand
my later transition
to cleaner things
and still gave me
that same passive smile
I wave to her now
squatting among the flowers
but she's blinking in the light
and looking away

Laura Carter On the Seawall

At night
your legs
next to mine
hang over the edge

Here
the bright shells are gone
and
no sun-warmed sand waits
to sneak up between your toes
to remind you
of earth
before you slide
slowly
into dark water

Below us
the ocean slaps
loud
against stark
unflinching concrete
and salty air
huddles over you
stinging your eyes
and blurring the stars

Brad Rickman

Running

The man stepped across the concrete divider, pausing briefly to allow a car to pass before him. He crossed the pavement and crushed his heels deeply in the white sand. In a straight line he ran toward the water, then turned when the sand became hard and moist beneath his feet and began to run parallel to the waves. It was evening. To his left the sun was dropping, still bright in his eyes but causing long shadows to fall away from him toward the water.

He ran slowly at first, controlling his pace, not wanting to expend his energy too soon. It was better to run longer at a lower speed. His breathing was easy. From time to time he took a deep breath and forced it out again, then returned to breathing normally. He was careful not to pant.

At first he had been surprised at how high the tide was this time of day. Storms had come in the early months of the year and driven the sea much farther up the shore, swelling it and pushing it all the way to the concrete seawall that protected the houses along the shoreline. Before, sand dunes had risen two rows deep in front of the wall. But the storms and the enlarged sea had swallowed them entirely, and now there was only the soft sand of the upper beach which baked hot and white under the sun each day.

The man glanced down at his legs and for a moment watched the muscles in his thighs tighten and bulge outward each time his feet hit the ground. His hair bounced against his forehead, matching the crunching rhythm of his shoes in the sand.

His eyes wandered. He tried to focus them at one level on the beach before him, first looking straight ahead at the horizon, then down to the sand passing under his feet. He tried to decide which view made the running easier.

At intervals the man passed by large, many-storied condominiums on his left. He used them to estimate the distance he had covered: this one meant a mile, this one two and a half miles, this one four. As he ran by them the sun was obscured for a moment and he felt a chill until he had passed beyond the shadows.

When the man ran he was alone, with nothing in particular to occupy his mind. This was often a mixed blessing. Sometimes thought was difficult, and he filled his head with other things: the pounding of his feet, the sound of his breathing, bits of shells scattered on the sand before him in lines which marked the advancement of the tide. He hummed pieces of songs to himself, sometimes even singing them out loud—although he found that this could cause him to breathe heavily.

He substituted his own words for the ones he could not remember. The trick, he knew, was not letting yourself grow weary.

Cars drifted by on his left, people coaxing the last rays of sun before daylight evaporated. On his right old men cast fishing lines into the surf and jabbed their poles into the sand to wait for fish. The old men wore caps to protect their heads from the sun and the salty wind. Ahead there was a short pier of rocks creeping out into the ocean to a point just beyond the breaking waves, and before it, a deserted lifeguard tower that had been pulled back into the soft sand and away from the tide. At this end of the beach there were dunes, but they had been bitten in half by the ocean.

Every day for the past two weeks the man had come running on the beach, crossing the road and making for the hard wet sand. He ran to the rock pier, past the lifeguard tower, and touched his right foot against one of the rocks in the jetty without stopping. Then he turned around and ran back in the direction from which he had come. He ran at almost exactly the same time each day, with the sun going down and the empty lifeguard towers and the old men in the surf with their fishing rods. The withering daylight cleared his head and his lungs and brought a warm, comfortable humming to his body.

The man could make out jagged edges on the rocks of the jetty in front of him now. Mercilessly white birds wandered between the rocks, poking their heads into the crevices and small pools that had formed at the base of the pier. There was a row of cars parked between the half-dunes and the rocks. The man noticed that most of them were pick-up trucks. The backs of the trucks were filled with fishing gear and poles, old wading boots and white buckets of fish that had grown rancid in the midday sun. During the first days that he had come running on the beach the man had tried to hold his breath as he passed the trucks, but found that he could not. Now he had grown used to the smell. A few fishermen still sat far out on the rocks, holding lines against the waves, their bodies cracking and wrinkled with sunburn.

The man passed the empty lifeguard tower, glanced up at its silhouette before the yellow sun. He ran twenty more feet and kicked out his right leg to touch the corner of a rock at the bottom of the pier, touching its edge with his toes through the shoes. It felt sharp, like the edge of a blade. The top of the rock was dry, cooked by the sun, but the bottom was wet from the tide pools and its rough surface was covered with barnacles. The smell of ocean was strong. Droplets of salt water from the waves crashing against the rocks fell on the man in a fine mist as he reached out his leg and then turned around. He began to run again, this time away from the pier.

It was only now that the man realized he had been running with the wind at his back. Turned around, he felt it blowing against his face, cooling the sweat on his chest and shoulders, pestering him with a small

coldness. He knew that he would have to run harder on the way back; the pain in his legs would sharpen and deepen and his lungs would grow tighter and heavier as he came closer to the end. He tried to control his pace. His mind filled with the white railings and blue outer panels of the walls of the condominiums which marked the end of his run, and for that moment he felt new energy. But as he squinted his eyes and peered down the beach he could not find the building; it was hidden around a bend in the distance. He looked down at the sand before him and monitored his pace again.

Shadows were growing longer on the sand. He passed the lifeguard tower once more and saw that the sun was now hidden completely behind the dunes at the top of the beach. The water was high, almost covering the rutted sand where the cars had been driving twenty minutes before. A radio played somewhere up ahead.

Sometimes the man came across large groups of birds, seagulls and sandpipers for the most part, standing by the edge of the water. They dipped their beaks into the surf and the sand to pick at worms and seaweed and small fish. The man regarded the gulls with distaste, crouched in the sand with their mottled feathers covered with bits of gray sea-slime and their eyelids sagging, pieces of plastic-wrap and garbage littered around them. If the mood was with him he would run directly into the crowd of birds, forcing the fat gulls to raise themselves up and waddle away while the little pipers squawked and scattered. Their feet left tiny three-pronged scratches in the sand.

Once, two days in a row, he had seen a piper with only one leg. It stood in the surf beside another bird, balancing on the three small needles that stuck out from the end of its single foot. The man did not chase the one-legged bird.

He continued to run along the beach. Waves rolled up to the edges of his feet. Water covered completely the footprints he had left on his way up the beach. On his right, at the base of the half-dunes, the man passed a walkway whose last twenty feet had been stolen by the waves, so that steps and loose boards hung there above the sand, not meeting the ground they reached for, rattling in the wind. In his head he checked off the distance.

His breathing had grown heavier, though he tried to stop it. He could feel the burning tightness in his chest; below, his legs weakened. They were not sore, nothing but the ankles anyway, but they felt numb and floppy. He had the sense that any moment they might give way and drop him onto the sand.

It was at this point each day that the man felt the strongest desire to stop: the point at which all parts of his body were struggling with malfunction. His head began to grow wobbly and white; the inside of his forehead filled with heat. Each step he took felt bad—not good and not strong, just bad. If he raised his eyes and looked ahead the distance

seemed too far: he thought he simply could not make it. In his dim panic he felt sure that if he stopped and rested a minute he would be able to finish. Or he could simply walk the rest of the way; it seemed that to continue when he felt weak was dangerous. But he did not stop, as he had not on any previous day. He fought his inclination. His pace dropped, his steps grew heavy and graceless, feet banging against the sand in shorter and shorter intervals and jarring the length of his body. But he did not stop. This is what he told himself: that he could not stop, could not break his stride. Once you broke your stride you could never regain it. You were finished.

When it was like this and he wanted badly to stop the man told himself that he was building something. He was building his body, a new body, strong and clean, purged of disease. Pain and suffering were part of this building. Pain was cleansing, was strengthening. He thought of words like Courage. Strength. Willpower. Determination. Character. Words with a weight to them. If he could run through the pain, if he could ignore it, it would soon pass and he would have become better because of it. He told himself that he must have Endurance, to tolerate the pain and the discomfort. He could not stop no matter how bad he felt or how badly he wanted to; he could not break his stride: something better lay beyond. That word, *better*. He said it to himself.

The man ran on. His stomach churned. The sun had disappeared below the horizon on his right. The beach was amber, the color of low flame. He checked off another mileage marker as he passed it, and then another. His mind became jumbled. Thoughts tripped over one another, swam blind and directionless, flailed. He found that this was not displeasing. Though it took place inside his head, there was a warmth that pushed it away and made it seem distant. The warmth was comfortable. It complemented the cool breeze against his skin. Warm inside, cool outside. Somewhere underneath he checked off the miles.

He rounded a bow in the beach and suddenly before him were the condominiums, small but visible, blue paneling stretching in a wide semi-circle on the right side of his vision. And the man felt now that he would make it, now that he could see them. The jelly in his legs began to drain, not leaving his legs but leaving his head. There was hotness still inside his forehead and his lungs, but he felt it less now that he could see the white railing, the walls towering, imitation stucco. He forced his feet to lift and descend, to lift again. He was panting; he had lost control of his breathing; he was uncertain of his vision. But the panels grew larger and now there were white spaces between them.

The man felt the ability to control his legs fading, as though nerves and tendons and cables of communication had ceased to function. Pain had been replaced by heaviness. He pressed them, lifted senselessly, bullied them into motion. His speed increased. The sound of the ocean had vanished; the hardness of the sand beneath his feet was

lost; the dripping yellow of the sun receded from his vision. There was nothing but the blue of the panels, the insistent numb lifting and lifting of his legs, and the white burning inside his forehead. His legs were like spinning wheels beneath him now, a blur of circular motion, barely touching the sand, pieces of smooth machinery on which he rode unconnected. His speed increased. The panels grew larger; the whiteness grew hotter. He was moving swiftly now, gliding, slick, over the sand. He was in motion.

And then, suddenly, before he expected it, the panels were gone, rushed by and behind him, and he was parallel to the building itself; it rose sharply beside him and draped a cold shadow over him where the sun had been. The man's feet stopped spinning, then bounced, then were still. He was panting heavily. Hair stuck to his forehead and hung in his face in clumps, dripping. His shirt stuck wetly to his chest.

He turned a small circle in the sand, walking sluggishly with his hands on his sides. He faced back up the beach. With his eyes squinted the man peered in the direction from which he had run, looking back to the half-dunes and the fishermen and the rock pier. But the beach had turned its bend again, and all he could see in the distance was a thin line of gray-black skimming the top of the ocean on the horizon, jutting out beyond the white sand.

Sometimes at night the man came back to the beach. It was different at night: there was a clarity that was not present in daylight. He crossed the street and walked down by the wall, where the dunes had once been. Above the wall lights and fires blazed, pinpoints of brightness in the deep blue of the night. Shimmering crystal and clipped laughter tumbled down, escaped from the late-night restaurants and open-air cafés and sent to roll across the sand and out over the ocean. Music, popping drums and shakers and tinny metal sounds, snaked its way to where the man walked. Women in brightly colored dresses with beads around their necks and breasts that shook against their shirts danced between tables on wooden floors, fluttering candlelight shadows writhing against the patio walls, and the men with them watched, waited, absorbed and smiling.

The man was envious of the people above the wall, of their smiling faces and the bright colors and lights and of their laughter, of the way the women's hips slid up next to the men and of the way the men smiled and moved their hands, following and reaching. Of the lightness beneath their feet.

He walked down to the edge of the water. The mist coming from the sea was cold and fine and left a salty taste in his mouth. Sand crunched under his shoes and he knew that it was cold also. He strolled through the darkness. The lights and noise began to fade behind him. All around were gray shapes, reflecting moonlight that was dampened

by the darkness. The gray shapes shifted but the man knew it was only rolling sea-mist in the corners of his vision. There were no landmarks in the darkness.

The man walked toward the rock pier. He could hear the waves crawling up beside his feet, see fingers of white foam stretching over the dark sand and then retreating, twisted and uneven.

Beyond the pier there was a bay where local fishermen sometimes caught sharks. Through the thin mist the man could see the opposite shore of the bay, the next town over, a rough horizon marked only by the lights—white mostly, but sometimes a red or green, even a blue—that were sprinkled in a drifting, jagged curve along the water's arc.

The man walked through the darkness. The mist was often cold against his arms and his face, although he did not seem to notice it against his legs. He walked slowly; he shuffled his feet. He noticed the air around him, the lights, the moonlight, the mist, the sand beside him and around him and underneath his shoes. He listened to the waves.

He passed the lifeguard tower again on his left and it was visible only in short, thin strips of moonlight reflected by its legs, a frightening and lonely thing, standing by itself on the open sand like a decaying sentinel. The man walked by and tried to keep from looking at it.

There was a small breeze blowing now, stirring the mist as it hung in the air. The breeze was warm and the man did not mind it.

He reached the jetty. It was difficult for him to see in the darkness, but the tops of the rocks were wet with spray and mist, and moonlight glistened on their uneven surfaces. The man stuck out his foot and touched it to one of the rocks at the base of the pier. He curled his toes inside his sneaker around the rock's edge, sharp like a blade. With his arms he reached out for balance and pulled himself up onto the top of the rock. He was careful not to slip.

When he reached the top of the jetty the man sat down on the flat surface of one of the rocks. Dampness soaked through the seat of his pants. He looked out toward the ocean and listened to the waves against the rocks. Where he sat they were quiet, shuffling easily up to the sand and stealing away again softly. But forty yards ahead, in the darkness where he could not see, they were crashing against the rocks, slamming loudly and clapping and sending up great jets of spray and foam. The noise was angry; he could hear it but he could not see.

He felt far away from her now. Looking out and away the night seemed endless and uncrossable, a dark and visionless space so infinite that it may as well have been a wall, and he could not climb it or pass through it or go around it; it was everywhere. The man sat and gazed into the darkness and the mist and felt hopelessly far away from her. He grew heavy on the rock—the dampness in the seat of his pants, the mist, the darkness, the distance. He felt he could not move; the weight of the

distance was too great and it lay upon him and was crushing him, making it difficult for him to breathe. Pictures of her came into his mind but they were fuzzy and indistinct, and he could not connect one to the next—they were like snapshots; he tried to run them together, to make motion—a moving picture—but he could not. They sat frozen and inarticulate in his head. The darkness was all around him, and it was cold, and he felt far away from her.

The man looked out into the darkness. He thought about the ocean, the waves rolling in and then out again, coming and going, taking form out of the endless space and then dissolving into it again. Passing through it.

After a time he stood up and climbed back down the rocks. His feet were unsure against the wetness.

When he reached the sand he stopped and stood and turned toward the ocean. He walked to the edge of the surf, looked down at the waves crawling up to the tips of his shoes. They came in, they went out, back into the darkness, traveling away. The waves were in motion, always in motion; they came toward him and they rolled up to touch him and then they rolled away again, and passed out through the open space, in motion, moving beyond it. He stood and watched them.

The man stepped into the surf, saw the small waves seep into his shoes and felt their wetness against his skin. For a moment he stood; then he began to walk forward into the water. Waves of ocean swirled around his feet, then his ankles, then his calves. Water soaked into his pants and held them tight against his legs.

When he had walked in up to his knees the man stopped and looked down at the water in front of him. It was moving; swirling and drifting, waves passing by him and around him and through him, up to the shore and then back again, touching him in both directions, then passing on into the space beyond him.

He reached out and touched his fingers to the water, stuck his hand in to the wrist. He felt the waves, felt the currents and the passage of the water. He felt it touch him and move on, traveling. To him and then from him, then back to him again, from beyond the darkness. He held his hand in and let the water pass over it and around it and he began to feel better. To him and then from him. He said it to himself.

Lisa Oakley



Jeanne M. Favazzo

The Mother of the Mother of the Bride

Away from the flurry
of the mint green bridesmaids,
you called to me
from the upper front room.
You held up the dress
that had been laid out for days,
sky blue,
your-eyes blue,
the one that had
pulled you to the store window
like a child to a candy counter.

Will you help me put this on?

You raised your arms,
full with the soft folds of age,
and I let the gathered fabric
slide down over your beauty shop curls
to rest lightly on your shoulders
and your girdled hips.
I fastened the buttons
and dusted the baby powder from the collar,
and turned you
to show you how beautiful you were.
But what I saw in the oblong mirror,
in your dress and your smiling eyes,
was how beautiful I could be.

Mark Mikula

To Have and to Hold

Robert played a piano near a fountain in the middle of the mall's food court. He had studied the piano formally for twelve years only to play to this amorphous and generally disinterested audience. People scurried past him, rushing to pay the Sears bill, to finish eating before their lunch breaks ended, to look at One Last Thing before their cars were ticketed for occupying Handicapped Zones. One of the elderly women who walked the mall floors for exercise every day often ended a song with "Oh, that reminds me of the time when . . .," but her compliments came so frequently that Robert dismissed them as conventional courtesies.

Mrs. Wuu, the Oriental woman who served Cantonese chicken at lunchtime, also praised Bobby, but perhaps, Bobby thought, she did this out of pity since the majority of the mall's patrons ignored him. She occasionally requested songs from *The Fiddler on the Roof*; it was the only musical she had ever seen. When her step slowed, when her brown cheeks lost their tension and caved in, Bobby would play for her.

And she would sing, shaking the oil from an order of egg rolls and flipping them into a styrofoam container. "Is this the little boy da-dum-da?"

Children turned their heads when he played a rendition of a rock and roll song, but they lost interest when Bobby returned to playing songs from the "official" Eastwood Mall playlist. The mall manager, Mr. McShea, had an affinity for antiquated musical styles. Robert was restricted for the most part to playing Broadway show tunes, classical waltzes, and other light fare. Mr. McShea did not want to offend his public by infesting mall corridors with jagged rock and roll and country covers.

Bobby had kept his overturned, blue-banded boater near his bench during the first week of work and spent the quarters that people threw him on comic books and pornography. Mr. McShea thought that boldly soliciting for money was unprofessional though. "You keep the hat on his head, and I'll let you keep your fingers on the piano," he told him.

Bobby wondered if anyone realized how difficult it was to hit the keys in the right order, to fill the air with his musical coffee. At times, he felt like nothing more than a model for his outfit (which Mr. McShea advertised as a donation from Falheimer's Formal Wear). He had dreams sometimes in which a player piano stood in the middle of the mall and received standing ovations. Bobby's shirt would grow damp beneath his shrinking tuxedo jacket as he galloped back to the refrains

of his songs from different angles. Bobby spent the first forty-five minutes of each hour trying to find a way to please his crowd and then spent the last fifteen recomposing himself.

When the Oriental woman wasn't serving Moo Goo Gai Pan she would bow in Bobby's direction, saying, "Isn't he good?" to the next person in line for lunch. She often made her comments clearer to people in this fashion, tilting her head so that her heap of thundercloud colored hair pointed in the direction of the objects to which she referred. When she clapped between songs, a small contingent would then follow her lead, dropping their plastic knives and forks to add a clap or two to the lukewarm praise. Bobby nearly laughed out loud when they were inconvenienced in this manner.

Both Robert and Debbie had been hired on the same day. "We're going to give the mall a brand new look," Mr. McShea said at the close of each of their interviews. "You're going to help us come a long way in doing that."

Debbie rooted her elbows on the podium above a sign that listed the price of a carousel ride as sixty cents. It struck Debbie and a lot of her friends at the coffee shop as being funny that she was still in the business of selling rides. She supported her weary head with a fist beneath each cheekbone. She shouldn't have let herself stay out so late the night before. She felt that she owed it to Badger, though. She wouldn't be seeing him very often any longer.

Badger came nearer to being a friend than anyone else. He could carry on a conversation, make her laugh after tipping her. He saw Debbie's human side. Debbie even gave him a discount sometimes.

Badger handed Debbie a bracelet after Mr. McGregor had turned off the grill, emptied the grease traps, and shut off the lighted DINER sign that rose from the pavement outside. "This is from me. I want you to have it," Badger said, letting the unclasped bracelet coil in her curved palm. "I didn't get anything put on it. I figured you might want to put something on there yourself." He pointed to the blank name plate in between the two golden chains.

"Badger, I don't want this."

The host of the party apologized with a hurt child's smile.

"What I mean is that you shouldn't have spent this kind of money on me. You've given me enough already."

"Well, I just figured I'd spent so much money on taking—" He stammered, and ran along the paths of his mind, scanning the corridors for the proper word. He couldn't find it. "On taking away from you, I thought I should spend some money on something that would give a little bit back."

The flowers would wilt and then die. The Wild Turkey she would drink in a fortnight, tossing the bottle away purposefully. The bracelet, though. The bracelet was indestructible. She would have to

answer for the bracelet.

Debbie roused herself and pulled the lever that stopped the merry-go-round. Her red hair was pulled back and knotted, stretching the wrinkles from her face. The mask of make-up that she wore like dried spackle cracked as she smiled. She thanked the departing riders and welcomed the new ones. It was her job to lure children onto the painted ponies. She was told to coax mothers away from their window shopping so that they would take their kids for a ride on the carousel. Her smiles had never been meant for women and children, though. After Debbie put the horses into motion, she returned to her ticket-selling station and enjoyed another three minutes of rest.

"Miss Carter, aren't you due for a lunch break?" Mr. McShea asked.

Debbie straightened and lifted her head from her hands. She said she had lost track of the time. "I didn't bring my watch to work today."

"Well, this'll be the last ride you'll have to give before you shut down."

"You know I'm doing pretty well today, Mr. McShea." The golf stroke counter nailed to the podium read 320. "Over three hundred riders and I haven't been here more than four hours."

Mr. McShea's experiment was working. Debbie Carter had brought her skills as a solicitor indoors, and she was generating revenue for the mall. The mall manager knew the worth of hiring older women like Debbie who wore tight skirts and claimed to have no prior work history.

Lillian Sipes lay on the recliner as if she were sitting in a dentist's chair. She stared at the ceiling and waited for her son to come home. She shouldn't have watched the news, but it came on right after a remake of *The Fly*. And she couldn't motivate herself to leave her chair and turn the channel. The remote control was lost somewhere.

Her mind was filled with vivid images. She forgot about the two years that Bobby had spent alone at the university. She saw herself standing at the kitchen window twelve years ago when Bobby had first crossed the street on his own on his way to primary school. He was nearly hit by a passing car. She ran after her son and brought him back into the house. Bobby rode to school with his father for another week.

Glancing at the crucifix on the wall behind the TV, she whispered a word to God. It's getting so late, she thought. When is he coming home?

Mrs. Sipes stared deeply at a faded color photograph of a young bride and her short-haired groom, centered on the fireplace's mantelpiece. The husband in the snapshot, and the one alive on that day were two different people. The man in the photograph stayed with the family

long enough to help his wife produce a son and guide him through high school.

Bobby was a pale reflection of her husband with the same golden hair, the same soft teeth, and the same wild eyes. (Mrs. Sipes took credit for the unattached ear lobes and the widow's peak.) Bobby's likeness to his father was so convincing that at times his mother nearly mistook the silhouette of her son for her husband's, feeling compelled to yell, "David! supper's ready! The yard work can wait until later." It took effort for her to change the position of her tongue and lips, to swallow her husband's name like a cherry sour just before calling for her son.

Her husband was often talked into singing at the wedding receptions of family members, and Bobby was taught to play the piano to accompany him. At first Bobby was indifferent to the lessons his mother gave. She tried to teach him how to play church hymns and later popular music after failing to excite him with orthodox teaching methods. He still refused to learn. Over a summer that he spent with his Aunt Victoria, he developed a sudden hunger to play, though. Bobby played "The Entertainer" in celebration of his parents' return from Europe. His mother and father had gone on a second honeymoon after the spring during which his mother had her miscarriage. Bobby played to celebrate their homecoming. What does my sister have that I don't have? the mother wondered, listening to the piano, smiling faintly. The father started to sing.

The door opened and Mrs. Sipes relaxed. "How was work?" she asked. "Did you have to take the bus home?"

"No," Bobby lied. "Janie drove me home." Janie was a waitress at the piano bar who gave him a ride home from work occasionally. Bobby felt too embarrassed to bring her inside to meet his mother.

"You and Janie aren't going out regularly now, are you?"

"Mother, I don't go out with people I work with."

"You know, if you've got a girlfriend, you should really let me know. I don't see why things have to be such a big secret between you and me."

Bobby stepped between a leaning stack of old newspapers and a hand of solitaire that his mother would finish playing later. "Any mail for me today?"

"I don't think so."

He reached for a pile of precariously balanced magazines and advertisements addressed to RESIDENT. They were heaped upon an end table next to the couch.

"I told you I didn't think there was anything for you today. What are you looking for?"

"Nothing," he said. He knocked a full ashtray to the floor as he skimmed a handful of slit-open envelopes from the top of the bundle.

"Look what you did!" she yelled, "I had everything in order over

there. Now you've gone and messed everything up!"

Last July's *Catholic Digest* slid to the matted carpet. Without the ashtray to lend support to the stack of sidelined letters, the pile lost its form and spread off the sides of the end table. Bobby brought the heap under control, setting the envelopes in his hand on the arm of the couch and falling forward. He cradled the edges of the end table with his arms and held the letters in place until he could adjust himself. Gradually, he reformed the stack, shifting the order of the papers so that it would stand freely. "Just leave it!" she yelled, biting her lower lip. "I'll have to put everything back the way it was."

"I've got it, Mother!" He replaced the last of the envelopes. "Everything's fine. I'll get the sweeper to pick up the cigarette butts."

He righted the overturned ashtray, and went to the closet where the vacuum cleaner stood on top of a pile of discarded clothing.

"When are you going to give these coats and things to Goodwill?"

"The church has a clothing drive next Sunday. I'll take them when I go to mass."

"Damn it, Mom! They have clothing drives every month. These things have been here since I came back home!" The clothes had actually been there since Bobby had outgrown them in grade school.

"Bobby," she said with a forced tranquility, "no one is asking you to stay. You can leave if you want to."

"Mom!" he yelled, banging the door frame with the angled Hoover. "I'm just saying that you've let this thing get worse ever since Dad left. Why do you have to save things? It's not normal! Normal people throw out the *TV Guide* at the end of every week. Normal people don't save coats that I wore when I was a kid!"

Mrs. Sipes reached out for a crumpled cigarette box and unraveled it, extracting the last one.

"I'm going to have something to eat," Bobby said after cleaning the carpet. He returned the vacuum cleaner to the closet, setting it atop of a black sweatshirt with a white square fastened to its collar. Bobby had worn it one Halloween, pretending that he was a priest. He took a handful of letters into the kitchen.

"Don't use the dishes in there. I just got them all washed. Use paper."

Bobby shook his head and muttered. He opened the refrigerator, and looked at the opaque butter containers heaped on the shelves. The pickles against the back wall had been there for as long as he could remember. "Which one of these is the Hamburger Helper?" he asked.

"A blue one. Try looking in one of the blue ones."

It took him a while to find the Beef Stroganoff substitute. He threw out a few of the decoys that he came across along with their sour-smelling, discolored contents en route to uncovering the right bowl. He

spooned the leftovers into a skillet and sat down to a cluttered kitchen table. He pulled out two envelopes with his name on them. One was directly addressed to him and the other to both him and his mother.

"Mom, there's mail for me here!" he yelled with less agitation.

"I'm sorry," she said in a steadier voice than the one she had been using. "I didn't notice." She was brooding about the invitation to leave which she had given Bobby. She had given her husband the same option. "Is it a letter from a girlfriend at school?"

Bobby was glad his mother no longer looked carefully at the mail. His father's name typed above their address touched too many nerves for her. Bobby wouldn't have enjoyed explaining why he was receiving his last check from the Blue Orchard. If his mother found out that he had quit his job at the piano bar and had accepted a job in a mall, she would have a number of questions for her son that Bobby didn't feel like answering.

The second letter, the one addressed to both him and his mother, invited them to Aunt Victoria's house to celebrate the first anniversary of Bobby's cousin, Sara, and her husband, Charles. Bobby had almost completely forgotten about Sara. "Mom, Uncle Bill and Aunt Victoria are having a party for Sara and her husband. Do you want to go?"

The Hamburger Helper began to hiss on the stovetop, and Bobby turned the heat down to keep it from sticking to the skillet.

Debbie dropped hints for two months without results. She sat through over a hundred songs, some of them twice, with her eyes fixed on Bobby. She consciously took her lunch breaks at twenty minutes after the hour so that she could listen to twenty-five minutes of his playing. The last five minutes of her break, she reserved for the outside chance of a conversation with the pianist as he recomposed himself. The attention she gave him never led anywhere though.

"Maybe you should try and wear nicer, nice girl clothes," Mrs. Wuu told her one day after hypothesizing that Debbie was extremely fond of Bobby.

"What?" Debbie asked, wondering what sort of response that was for a person who just ordered two egg rolls.

"Nicer, nice girl clothes," the woman said. She could not remember the word conservative, so she bowed toward a business woman in a blue blazer. "I talk to Bobby as he on his way out of here sometimes. He go to college for two years. He probably like to meet girl who dresses like good old college girl, like girl next door. You know, less make up and all that."

Debbie was initially offended by Mrs. Wuu's advice. She enjoyed dressing liberally. Her black stockings, her leather mini skirt, the red heels in which she had learned to saunter: they were all very comfortable to her. But with her second paycheck, she bought a

Cardigan, some khaki slacks, and a pair of Earth-toned flats. On the day that she wore the outfit, she applied less make-up to her face.

Bobby gradually began to feel a twinge of appreciation for Debbie's applause. He hadn't even noticed her until Mrs. Wuu asked him to pay more attention to his audience. "You'd be surprised at how good some people think you play, Bobby," she said nodding toward the tables where the luncheoners sat. Debbie slowly etched herself into Bobby's mind behind the vanguard of her unabashed applause. She clapped with what Bobby interpreted as true sincerity. Bobby looked over to her sometimes but looked back at his fingers before he could be accused of staring. From a distance she resembled his piano instructor from Fordham.

Bobby and Debbie first spoke to each other at the employee Christmas party that Mr. McShea held in mid-December. Mrs. Wuu picked up Debbie at a quarter until nine and then drove with her past the reception hall, where the party was being held, and onto the expressway. "Where are you going?" Debbie asked, fearing that she already knew the destination.

"You have to have date for this party. This a big date party."

"Where's your date?" Debbie asked.

"I have a husband. I not need a date."

Mrs. Wuu pulled into the driveway of the Sipes residence and honked the horn. Bobby came out smiling until he saw in the moonlight that the front seat was occupied.

Debbie opened the passenger-side door and uncomfortably attempted to introduce herself. She bent over to allow Bobby to maneuver himself into the backseat and then asked if Bobby owned the house out of which he had come.

"No, I don't own the house," Bobby said unsteadily. He couldn't tell Debbie that he lived with his mother. "I lease it. It's leased."

"Oh?"

Mrs. Wuu spoke to break the uneasy silence that followed these first few remarks. "Debbie started working at the same time that you did."

"Really," Bobby said, "what did you do before getting your job at the mall?"

"Stuff," Debbie said. "I was an operator on the telephone and stuff."

Debbie and Bobby sat with Mrs. Wuu at a table along the periphery of the room. The light that centered on the dance floor didn't reach their table. In the shadows, Bobby played with the table cloth, stretching, nearly breaking the plastic with his fingertips.

"It's generic," Mrs. Wuu said, keeping her head upright.

"What, the table cloth?"

Debbie turned away from the dance floor and brought her

plastic glass away from her lips.

"No, the egg nog. It's generic."

"It tastes pretty strong to me."

"No, believe me, I know my egg things. Egg drop soup, egg foo young, egg nog. I know. You, you taste what they put into it. Alcohol."

"Who's they?"

"Some people from the record store. They put stuff in it every year." Mrs. Wuu bowed toward the center of the dance floor where a group of teenagers was slam-dancing to a peped up version of "Santa Claus Is Comin' to Town."

Debbie fixed her gaze on the dancers and drank from her glass.

"Why don't you two go out there?" Mrs. Wuu asked. "Don't worry about me. You kids go off and have some fun."

Bobby reluctantly agreed to step out onto the dance floor under Mrs. Wuu's suggestion and Debbie's invitation. The two of them danced comfortably apart from one another for four songs, struggling to converse over the loud music. Bobby was glad that the music was fast.

When the band started to play "White Christmas" after "Jingle Bell Rock," Debbie asked Bobby to dance, though. He knew that he wouldn't be able to slow dance with Debbie. Holding a woman against his chest would bring back the memory of that summer at his aunt's house, of his cousin Sara. He was already quivering. "Would you mind if we sat this one out?" Bobby asked. "I'm sweating like a pig. Maybe a little later, we'll dance some more."

"All right," Debbie said, brooding over how much older than Bobby she was. She went back to the table and talked with Mrs. Wuu as Bobby stepped outside to get some fresh air.

"You just grab him and make him dance with you next time," the Oriental woman said when Debbie voiced her concern over their differences in age. "He won't think about the years old you are when you grab him and hold him on the dance floor. You wait, and things will be all right. You and Bobby good for each other. You look good dancing with him."

Debbie followed Mrs. Wuu's advice when the band began their next slow set. She grabbed Bobby's wrists as the drummer sang the opening to "The Christmas Song" and pulled Bobby's body up against hers. He wanted to resist, but he didn't want to offend Debbie. Debbie was beautiful with her red hair hanging loosely from her head, overlapping the shoulders of her forest green sweater.

He started to shake as Debbie pressed the side of her face against his. He could feel his sweat pressed against Debbie's cheek. Bobby shook, trying to stay with the beat of the music, focusing on the music. Debbie asked him if he was all right, but Bobby did not answer. Concerned, Debbie grabbed his shoulders and started to step back. Her

Christmas brooch was hooked on Bobby's sweater, and she was pulled forward as she started to speak again. She laughed as she fell against his chest. Bobby almost called her a weirdo as he tore his sweater, pulling away from her and running outside for air.

Debbie looked up Badger's phone number that night and called him but couldn't get an answer. On the day after the Christmas party, Debbie went back to work wearing Spandex and stockings.

Bobby played the piano to a different Debbie that week. At first, he did not even recognize her. He heard Debbie's sincere applause, but the clapping hands belonged to a different woman. Only after two days of noontime playing could Bobby be certain that Debbie was the woman in the short skirts behind the heavily painted mask.

On the third day, he approached Debbie during the last five minutes of her lunch break and attempted an apology. "I owe you an explanation," he said. "I acted completely out of line the other night. I wish I could go into detail about why I tore myself away from you at the party. You don't have time to listen to or to understand it all, though. Let me just say that you shouldn't take anything that happened at the party personally."

Bobby sat at the edge of a checkered blanket and nibbled at the white of his tuna sandwich. Sara sat across from him in a flowered sun dress with her legs stretched out in front of her. She focused on keeping her ankles crossed. The sun shone down upon their picnic, awakening the green of the grass and the blue of the passing creek. The mouths of fishes surfaced as Bobby threw the edges of his bread into the water. Sara grabbed his wrist as he got ready to throw another part of his crust.

"You know the brown part is good for you!" Sara said.

"I don't need to be told nothing," Bobby said, pulling his arm away from his cousin's grip. "There's some of my friends at school. They don't eat any of the bread. They just slip the meat right out of the sandwich and throw the rest away."

Bobby hated picnics. The ants bothered him. The bees hovered around his brownies like iron pellets passing a magnet. And the wind tugged at his napkin and tried to upset his plate. The sun tortured him, knowing how uncomfortable it could make him feel in the long-sleeved shirt and the thick trousers that his uncle had chosen for him. And to top it off, he had to talk to Sara, a girl who said a lot of stupid things and made Bobby watch her soap operas during the long weekday afternoon that Bobby spent at his aunt's house.

"Do you want to taste some of my sarsaparilla?" Sara asked, teasing Bobby by rotating her bottle near his face.

"No, I like my cream soda better."

"You don't even want to know what sarsaparilla tastes like?" she said, sliding slowly toward her cousin.

"It tastes like root beer," Bobby said assertively.

"No, it doesn't," Sara teased, almost laughing. "It tastes farther from root beer than anything I know. You sure you don't want to try it?" Sara tilted the bottle, filled her mouth with soda, and swallowed dramatically.

Bobby acquiesced as Sara licked her lips. "All right. I'll try some," he said, holding out his hand.

Sara placed the bottle in Bobby's palm and then pulled it away suddenly. She was going to try and kiss him again. He watched her eyes get larger as she tilted her head. He fell backwards and spilled his cream soda all over his shirt.

"Thanks a lot!" he said, pushing Sara off of him and sliding away from her into the grass. He picked himself up after an uncomfortable silence and began to walk away from the checkered blanket. "I'm going back to the house. You're weird."

"But the picnic's not over. You haven't eaten your dessert!"

"I'm not going to sit out here in a sticky shirt with a weirdo."

They went back to the house, and Bobby went to his uncle's room where he kept his suitcase. After taking off his shirt and throwing it in the hamper, he tiptoed to the closet where he reached under a pile of towels to handle one of his uncle's *Playboy* magazines. His uncle didn't realize that the shelf that he kept them on was right at Bobby's eye level and that Bobby would find them since he kept his suitcase right beneath the towels. If his uncle had known, he would have hidden them with the videotapes and the explicit periodicals that he hid in the basement away from his curious daughter.

Bobby laid the magazine on his uncle's pillow and silently flipped the pages until he could open the centerfold. He quietly slid his pants and underwear to his knees and placed himself face down on his uncle's blanket. Slowly, he rocked back and forth, first thinking about the bare-breasted woman on the pillow and then about Sara in her dress with her crossed ankles. He wasn't supposed to think these thoughts. They were unhealthy. His mother had told him that dirty minded boys went where God would never love them. "You have to wait until you're married to do any of the things that I told you about."

He rocked faster, sliding his hands underneath the pillow and grabbing the sheet at the edge of the bed. He closed his eyes and Sara was turning cartwheels in her summer dress across Aunt Victoria's lawn. She wasn't wearing any panties. She was jumping into her parents' swimming pool, losing her dress in the water. He was sweating and the bed was creaking. He could only barely hear the footsteps in the hallway and didn't have time enough to save himself. Rising to his knees, he yanked his trousers to his waist. He couldn't bother with his fly. Closing the magazine, he threw it underneath the pillow, creasing the centerfold in the wrong places. The doorknob

turned, and he looked over his shoulder at Sara who was standing beneath the threshold. "Get out of here! I'm putting on my pants!"

"Why are you lying down?"

He rolled to sit up, and Sara stared at the open-mouthed slacks. "Get out of here! Wait until I'm done changing!"

Sara walked past Bobby as he buttoned his trousers. She reached under the rumpled pillow and pulled out the *Playboy*. "You were looking at my Daddy's magazines!"

"No, I wasn't. It was already there when I got in here," Bobby stammered. "And I was changing and I looked at it for a second."

"It's all right. It's not really all that bad to look at naked people. Sometimes I watch my Dad when he's with—"

"You watch Uncle Bill when he's with your Mom?"

"Listen," Sara said, lowering her voice, "I'll tell you a secret if you let me kiss you."

"No, I'm not going to let you kiss me. That's sick! I don't want to know no dumb secret."

"I saw my Dad with another person one time." Bobby was plugging his ears. He slowly opened them as his cousin whispered the secret. "They let us out of school one day early because of snow, and I came home and there was a woman's coat on the couch. The lady with my Dad didn't giggle like my Mom either, so I walked outside and stood on the picnic table bench to look into the room. My Dad was there with a different naked woman than my Mom. I went and played in the snow until it came time for me really to come home.

"Don't tell anyone about it though. I don't want my Mom and Dad to stop being my parents. Ellen at school said that that was what happened when her Mom had a boyfriend."

Bobby shook. His tongue sat lifelessly at the bottom of his mouth. How could his uncle love anyone except Aunt Victoria? His mother had told him that people who didn't love the people they married committed a sin for which God would make them pay.

"Can I kiss you now?"

"What?" Bobby asked.

"The secret. I told you the secret. You promised I could kiss you."

Sara fell upon him, pushing him flat across the width of the bed. She kissed her cousin like she had practiced on her pillow. Bobby struggled beneath her breathing body until he could muster up enough strength to shake her off of him. She pulled her fingers out of his hair.

"Let me see it!" she said, pinching her fingers together and reaching through Bobby's open fly to touch his B. V. D.s. She spread her fingers like the petals of a blooming tulip. Bobby was powerless, shaking. And he lay there as Sara lifted her dress and kneeled over him, straddling his midsection. Neither of the children knew that Aunt

Victoria had been in the house until the doorknob turned.

Bobby mingled in his Aunt and Uncle's antiseptic home. Objects rarely accumulated in this environment. When new items were brought into the house, they almost invariably replaced the old ones. A week's worth of newspapers sat on the ledge in front of the fireplace. When the *Daily Spectrum* came in that morning, Aunt Victoria put it on the top of the stack and wrapped the leftovers from breakfast in the bottom paper. She replaced the flowers in the vases with fresh ones and dusted to remove the fine fuzz that had accumulated on the furniture the day before.

Bobby strolled through the spacious house, mingling with the few people he knew. Most of the people invited to the party were friends of Sara and her groom, Chuck. Bobby had never met them. He was attending Fordham when the couple was married and couldn't interrupt his academic year for the wedding, so he was never introduced to many of these guests.

Nothing in the house seemed to have changed. The pastel, rose-shaped soaps still slept in a little dish next to the bathroom sink. The laundered, monogrammed towels were hung carefully from a rack near the streakless mirror. Bobby weighed himself on the digital scale that his relatives kept under the sink.

Bobby merged back into the crowd of guests who had collected in the living room. He dodged loosely held drinks and the swaying bodies of conversationalists as he made it to the other side of the room. The chess set with its heavy gold and silver pieces remained on the end table next to the sofa. He picked up the silver bishop and marveled at how much smaller the markers seemed now. When Bobby was ten, he nearly had to use both hands to lift the pieces from the board.

"Still remember everything I taught you?" his uncle asked, extending the hand that didn't hold a drink.

"Sure do. I played for the chess club last semester at Fordham."

"Oh, that's right! I remember you writing that in one of your letters. Are you thinking about going back to school any time soon?"

"Well, I might go back sometime next year. The way I see it there's no big hurry. I want to make sure that my Mom's back on her feet before I take off again."

"She still all wrapped up in your father?"

"She thinks about him all the time. I'm afraid one of these days she's going to go completely over the edge. She's more hung up on him than ever."

"I can't imagine your Mother being any more dedicated to your Father than she was when you were a kid. She came over here almost every time after your Dad would go back to his regiment. Most of the time she'd just be lonely and broken-hearted. But sometimes she'd be

drunk. I'd get scared about letting her go home, and so I'd let her stay in the guest room. You were probably too young to remember any of that."

"Well, I remember the drinking. She doesn't do any of that anymore, thank God. She kicked the bottle after Dad left the military. Once she had to deal with the miscarriage, though, she started saving things and stuff; that's when Dad did what he did."

"Do you talk to your Dad at all?"

"I talked to him once. He just called one time to see how I was doing. I don't want to bother him now that he's trying to set up with another family in New Mexico. He gave me his phone number. I'm not supposed to let my Mother know about that."

"What are you doing with yourself these days?" Uncle Bill asked, draining the color from his ice cubes and holding his empty glass near his waist. "Still working at the piano bar?"

"No, the people there gave me a bunch of shit when they found out that I was still living with my Mom."

"Bobby, when things start happening like that, you've got to start thinking for yourself. You've got to move away and get a new job."

"Well, I've got this thing at the mall now where I play—"

"I'm not talking about something like that. I'm talking a real change. Drop the piano and pick up those credits that you need to graduate. Go into something different. Or get a girlfriend or something. I hate to see you dragged back from school because of something between your mom and your dad—or rather, something between your mom and herself now."

Bobby walked outside after listening to his uncle's advice. He took off his shoes and socks and walked across the manicured lawn in his bare feet. Rolling up his pant legs, he dangled his legs, from the knees down, in the water. He cupped his hand and brought some water to his forehead. The smell of chlorine overwhelmed him.

When he went back to the house, Sara met him at the screen door with her husband. "Chuck," she said, "this is my cousin Bobby. I used to have such a crush on him!"

Bobby stood at the bus stop with three quarters, waiting in his fist. Bouncing on the balls of his feet, he blew over the coins. He slouched beneath his rumpled formal jacket. He would wear the tuxedo for another day before Falheimer's would dress him in a new one. His hair was spangled with snow, and he lifted his legs and shook them alternately in order to keep warm.

Three busses passed by him. He didn't recognize any of the destination panels. He waved down a bus that was headed for the Fremont Hospital.

"No, Buddy, the 32 Bus came by about ten minutes ago," the

driver said apologetically.

Bobby cursed. He nearly pressed his knuckles through his trouser pockets as he turned to walk home. He almost made it to the first of many stoplights when a Chevette pulled into the slow lane and stopped behind the traffic at the intersection. "Do you want a ride?" Bobby heard faintly as the car door swung open.

Bobby bowed from the waist and saw Debbie sitting behind the wheel. "I don't want to make you go out of your way," he said. The light turned green.

"Hurry up! Get in!" Debbie said. She prepared to release her foot from the brake.

Bobby dropped the quarters into a trouser pocket and clipped his fingers to the roof of the car. He swung himself into the passenger's seat and slammed the car door as the Chevette leaped forward.

"God, it's cold!" Bobby said, stretching his legs beneath the dashboard. "Thanks."

The music coming from the car radio was replaced by a series of commercials. Debbie took one of her hands off the wheel to change the station. "Do you ride the bus home all of the time?"

"When I catch it."

"All those lunch breaks spent together and you never even told me that you didn't drive to work?! You know, I can give you a ride back and forth to the mall if you want. We work the same hours."

"No, that's all right, I—wait a second. Could you switch that back for a second?"

Debbie turned the knob until Billy Joel's voice came from the car speakers behind a curtain of static. "Sing us a song you're the piano man." Bobby's voice fell unevenly against the lyrics and he stopped singing before too long. "That's why my dad took care of most of the singing and I stuck with the piano."

"Did you and your dad used to sing this together?" Debbie asked.

"No, not this. I used to play this back in school and my friends would sing it. We'd all get really drunk, and I'd play for them. God, do I miss that."

"Why don't you go back then?" She looked at Bobby. The shape of his eyes reminded her of Badger sometimes.

"It wouldn't be the same. Besides my mom still needs me here. Give it a little more time and maybe I'll head back."

Debbie kept quiet.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking. My uncle thinks the same way, just leave it all behind. But it's not that simple. I've got to stay with it a little longer."

They passed beneath a viaduct and nearly lost the radio station. As she entered Bobby's neighborhood, he asked her if she would

pick him up at quarter until ten the next morning.

Debbie backed away from Bobby as soon as she felt his fingers stiffen. "Don't be nervous, Bobby. I'm not going to spank you. I don't spank the little boys that I keep after school." Bobby heard the clock ticking in the background, Debbie's first housewarming gift, a present from her mother.

"I know, Miss Carter. I heard from Tony, my lab partner, that you only do nice things with them," he said.

"Bobby," Debbie said, extending her fingers over her student's crotch, "what have your friends been saying about me during recess?"

"They say that you're a whore, Miss Carter." It was raining outside and Bobby saw nothing but gray sky beneath the half-drawn shade.

Debbie lifted her hand away from Bobby's fly and slapped him harder than she had planned to smack him. The cat scampered across the floor of Debbie's apartment, scurrying into the bathroom.

"I thought you said you weren't going to hit me, Miss Carter," Bobby whined, rubbing his reddened cheek, leaning back against the bed.

"No, I said that I wasn't going to spank you," Debbie corrected. "Do you know the difference between hitting and spanking?"

Bobby nodded.

"Show me," Debbie said.

"Show you?"

"Yes, first I'm going to have you hit me and then I'm going to have you spank me to see if you know the difference."

"Miss Carter, I know the difference, I don't think that—"

"Bobby, hit me!"

"No, Miss Carter, I—"

"Bobby—" Debbie urged impatiently.

"I'm not supposed to—"

"Mama's Boy!"

Bobby twisted Debbie's neck as he brought his hand across her face. "Oh, my God! Debbie!" he said frantically, placing a gentle palm on each side of her face. He turned her head toward him.

Debbie slowly opened her eyes. "We're going to have to try this again," Debbie said, recovering from the momentary lapse that the blow had caused. "You can't slip out of character."

"I can't do this, Debbie."

"Listen, we have to break this thing with your mother. Now let's take it from the beginning."

"Did you hear what I said?" Bobby asked in disbelief. "I'm not going to hit you again."

"I took shit that was way worse than this when I was on the

streets, so let's go again."

Debbie assumed her starting position, but Bobby wouldn't move.

"Listen, when we say goodbye to your mother tomorrow—"

"Wait a second, wait a second. What do you mean we?"

"Yeah, we. I'm not going anywhere with you until I've met your mother. You met my parents."

"I've already told you everything you need to know about my Mom."

"All I know about your Mom is that she started saving things after she had a miscarriage. And that your father left her because she couldn't throw anything away. And that she screwed you up with a lot of religious talk on how sex was dirty."

"There, that's all you have to know."

Lillian Sipes stood on her sister's porch. Rain was falling from the skies, and both she and the cab driver were getting wet. Her escort guided her finger onto the doorbell, and her brother-in-law, Bill, promptly led the two of them into the vestibule of the house. He had been expecting them. The bartender had called to tell him that Lillian Sipes requested that she be dropped off there for the night. "I just don't want Bobby to see me this way," she told her brother-in-law. She repeated herself as Bobby's uncle paid the cab driver.

As soon as the driver left, Mrs. Sipes staggered toward her brother-in-law and held him tightly. "Bill, do you know how much I miss him?" she asked with her eyes full of tears. She gripped his shirt and fell upon her knees. "Do you know how much I miss him?"

"I know," her brother-in-law said emptily, lifting her from the linoleum with a hand beneath each arm. He led her into the master bedroom, laid her on the bed, and left to get some dry towels and fresh clothes for his sister-in-law.

Why did Lillian tease him like this? Why did she make herself so vulnerable? And tonight, on a night when Victoria was away with Sara. He brought a pressed nightgown into the master bedroom and said he'd leave the room so that she could put it on. She didn't answer him, though, because she was unconscious.

Bill was torn between letting his sister-in-law sleep in wet clothes or putting her into the clean nightgown himself. He struggled to suppress his conscience as he decided to remove her wet outfit and place her in the dry nightgown.

If she could have just refrained from her drinking, everything would have been fine. Why couldn't she have just gone home to her son on nights like these? Why did she drink enough to make her pass out this evening? Bill unbuttoned her blouse and touched her breasts. She looked so much like Victoria.

Lillian revived herself as her brother-in-law raped her. She remembered trying to lift her wrists from the blanket, but Bill was holding them down. He pressed his entire self down upon her, down into her. He couldn't stop now only because she was conscious. This demon, this desire had a life of its own now.

By morning time Bill had fabricated a complete and believable story that implicated Lillian just as much as it did him. She had seduced him. "You wanted me to replace your husband for just this one night. You said how much you missed him. Do you remember that?"

Lillian vaguely recalled saying that she had missed her husband.

"You kept insisting that I make love to you. 'Take away the loneliness,' you said. Do you remember?"

Lillian wasn't certain about any of the details of the night before and had no choice but to believe her brother-in law's story. Bill funded the abortion when Lillian found out that she had been impregnated during the encounter. Complications with the abortion sterilized Lillian Sipes. In order to preserve her husband's faith in her fidelity and save her family from ruin, she had to fabricate a story around the complications that occurred during a fictitious miscarriage.

Bobby spent the night in Debbie's apartment. It was the first night he spent away from home since he returned from college. Bobby fell asleep in the middle of the bed, discouraged with himself. Once Bobby was asleep Debbie slipped beneath the covers and pushed herself against him, her back to his front, conforming to his shape. And they slept together in that position, like spoons stacked in a silverware drawer. Bobby, in waking up next to Debbie with the morning, reconsidered his initial decision not to introduce her to his mother. "Should I wear a black garter belt or a red one for the occasion?" Debbie asked laughingly as they drove to the mall for their last day of work.

Debbie and Bobby ate lunch together once he added the final note onto her favorite song. Before they left Eastwood, Bobby and Debbie stopped at the arcade and had their pictures taken in the arcade photo booth. Five black and white Polaroids for \$1.25. Then they stepped into the parking lot leaving the piano and the carousel lever for other hands.

"Mom, I want to introduce you to my girlfriend, Debbie."

"What is this?" his mother asked.

"This is it!" Bobby exclaimed, stepping into the house past Mrs. Sipes. Debbie followed until they reached the stairs.

"This is what?" Mrs. Sipes asked. She was facing Debbie. The women watched him rise two steps before he turned.

"This is it, Mom. This is when I leave."

"You're not leaving. I was up all night waiting for you. You're

home now."

"Mom, you've known about this for at least two weeks now. Remember what I told you? I said that Uncle Bill thinks that it's a good idea for me to finish my classes at school and get a substantial job."

"You've been here for half a year now though."

Debbie was outside of the conversation, looking at the piles of newspapers and clothes that were strewn throughout the living room.

"I'm sorry, I would have cleaned up, but Bobby didn't—"

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs. Sipes. We're not going to stay. Bobby just thought it would be a good idea if we met before I went back with him to New York."

Debbie could see the tears welling in Mrs. Sipes's eyes as her son went up to his bedroom. "Bobby says you got him started on the piano. I love to listen to him play."

Mrs. Sipes nodded and exerted herself in smiling. Debbie didn't want to speak to Mrs. Sipes for fear of releasing the tears. Mrs. Sipes stretched her face, breathed deeply and quivered, holding her moist eyes wide.

She cried as soon as Bobby and Debbie backed out of the driveway and cursed her brother-in-law from behind the window. The couple drove away with Debbie's bracelet sleeping in the toe of a coiled stocking and a snapshot of young cousin Sara in a plastic jacket in Bobby's wallet.

Mrs. Sipes found the black and white Polaroid of Bobby and Debbie a week after the couple left. Bobby had placed it on his pillow where he knew that his mother would find it. Her first impulse was to throw it away, but after some hesitation she ended up putting it in the drawer in the kitchen where she kept rubber bands and light bulbs.

Jonathon Hexner



Leigh Edwards

Florida Snow

I remember that winter —
Sniffling noses and mittens for
hands, and you dancing through
sunlight patches on the ground like the
quilt Mother used to wrap us in.
Go-Kart exhaust piping and wheels
caught in whiteness;
dark tracks on a hill of light-
lining snow.

“I can drive faster than you,”
my voice pulling air through
my mouth, making smoke puffs—
like our horses
when they ran to the fence.

Sticking my tongue out at you
and the moisture,
that wouldn’t fall enough
for me to taste it.

And you running faster in
boot-bundled feet than
I could hope to
on my stretching legs.

Two steps behind you
and never quite gaining.

Father laughed at the two sets
of scarf-wrapped brown eyes,
but my nose looked different
than yours.

Kick-out striding, pushing wind
with my stick legs,
yet the space between us shimmering
so solid and full and unclosable.

Anne Faircloth The Caretaker

It is, of course, none of my business. Herb tells me that every time I get to talking about them. But, darn it, they're neighbors, and doesn't the Bible say, "love your neighbor as yourself." Well, to me that means getting involved, and I should sincerely hope that they would pay me the same neighborly concern. After all, that's what we're here for.

You know, I have always felt sorry for that girl. You can ask Herb if you don't believe me, but I have always said from the word go that that child has been dealt a bad hand.

Now, not many people know this 'cept for Herb who knows pretty near everything (or at least thinks he does.) Anyways, not many people know that I am the first citizen of Grand Island, North Carolina, outside of the doctors of course, to see that baby.

James called me up, you see. I think it might've even been from the hospital, and he said, "Marie, I need someone to take care of my new baby."

Now I knew Miss Kathleen was due to have that baby any day, so of course I wanted to get all the particulars. You know, how it all went, when did labor start, what it was, a boy or a girl, for gosh sakes. But you know James, once he gets it in his head that he wants something, he ain't about to listen to any pleasantries. And what he wanted from me was to come and take care of his baby.

Well, I can tell you now, it wasn't a bit of trouble what with my boy Nelson stationed down at Fort Jackson and Herb working all the time. I didn't have a thing to do other than watch the soaps. And I'll be honest with you—they're no good after the first couple of weeks. They all start sounding the same, and I stopped caring about all those people's mess.

But that little baby! Gosh, you couldn't help but love her. Elizabeth, they called her, never Betsy or Beth or Liz or anything. Just Elizabeth, but I called her "turtle" 'cause when she'd be in her stroller with just her head peeking out, that's what she'd look like. Anyways, that Elizabeth was one of the sweetest children you ever laid eyes on.

I cannot, however, speak so highly about Miss Kathleen. I know I should be kinder, Lord knows I try, but that woman just didn't think right. I could've told you the minute I heard James was bringing his new wife in from New York or somewhere. Now I've got nothing against Northerners. I'm not the kind to go around calling them carpetbaggers, but a person's got to have roots and Miss Kathleen just didn't. I never heard a word about her family or her hometown. All I know was that she was a writer, and she came down here to marry

James.

You know what I did when I was over in Fayetteville at the mall? I went to the Waldenbooks to see if I could find something she wrote. They had them alphabetical, and so I looked under Mathis, but sure enough, there wasn't anything. So then I thought: Marie, that's James' name; you want Shapiro. You see, I remembered that's who she was before. And you know what? There it was, *Open Ended* by Kathleen Shapiro.

So of course, I brought it home to read. It was all right. A little tough going in places, but basically a good story. There were a lot of details that I'm skipping on account of I don't want to bore you to death (and I didn't really follow them), but it's more or less about a woman who goes crazy, not totally nuts crazy, just kind of out of touch. It was one of those stories where the main person is "I" which is kind of weird when you know who wrote it. I mean, I know the person talking wasn't Miss Kathleen, but you kinda have to wonder.

I never told her. That I read the book I mean. At first I was going to, the minute I got home, but then it was sort of nice, like being a spy and knowing something she didn't.

Probably would have yelled at me anyway. God, that woman could yell, or maybe it just sounded worse 'cause of that accent. Whenever she and James would take to fighting, and it happened a lot, I would get Elizabeth out of there as quick as I could. Now I'm all for being honest with children, but those two were just a little too honest for me.

She was always complaining, Miss Kathleen was, about every little thing. She'd come back from the grocery all mad because they didn't have lamb, or avocado, or something like that. Who in the world cooks lamb or avocados in Grand Island? I swear.

Or she'd say that no one ever talked about anything at the book club teas. Now, I don't know about you, but I think it's real hospitable they even asked her to join. That's a real honor. (Lord knows they never asked me.) Your mother is supposed to have been in the club and your grandmother too, for that matter. And here Miss Kathleen is, an utter stranger, and they nicely go out of their way and bend all the rules 'cause she's James' wife and a writer besides. And then she goes and says all they talked about was gothic romances and Danielle Steele books. Now I've read a couple of Danielle Steeles myself, and I thought they were pretty good.

She said no one ever talked about ideas; no one ever explored anything. I think she might've been mad 'cause they never did her book.

And poor James had to listen to that kind of mess all the time. And probably that poor Elizabeth, too, when I wasn't around to keep her out of the way. I'd hear her come down on that child, though, about

being too loud or not having good manners. I even heard her say that Elizabeth was getting a Grand Island accent. Well, Lordy be, the child lives here, I thought. Why shouldn't she talk like it?

One time when Elizabeth was taking a nap, Miss Kathleen asked me did I want a cup of tea. Well, we'd never really talked much, and I had nothing better to do, so I said sure. Well, I thought she meant iced tea, but no, she was talking about hot tea, something fancy and herbal, and here it was the middle of the summer. It was okay, but I'll take that Nestea instant anyday.

"Marie," she said to me while we were cooling our tea, "sometimes I wonder how you can stand it here." Well, that was crazy. My great-grandfather built the house I live in, and she asks me how I can stand it.

"Well Lord, Miss Kathleen," I said. "This is my home. You just don't have roots here. It takes time."

"I don't want roots, Marie. They can drag you down in heritage and tradition."

Oh my, I thought. It's just like that book she wrote, but I didn't say anything. I just tried to figure out what she was talking about so I could answer her and not sound like the village idiot.

"Have you ever been to New York, Marie?" she asked me.

"Well, no ma'am," I said. "To be honest, I've never been any further North than Richmond to stay with my great-aunt when she had her gall bladder out."

"Oh you should go if you can," she told me. "You can feel the city; it's so alive." And then she says, "I don't know why I'm telling you all this. I know you love Grand Island." And just then I heard Elizabeth, so I never got a chance to answer her.

So you'd think I wouldn't have been surprised when I went over there today to find Miss Kathleen up and gone. James stopped me at the door. "Just left," he said, "real early this morning." And then he asks me if maybe I'd tell Elizabeth. Said he didn't think she'd ever be coming back, kept on mumbling nonsense, and so I knew that it was up to me with him ranting and raving.

"Turtle, honey," I said. "Your mamma's gone away for a while. Now you know she loves you very much, don't you ever forget that. She just needed to get away for a while, but we're gonna have fun, you and me, and we're not going to think about it."

I thought, you know, that maybe she'd get upset, but she didn't. Just turned her little face up to me and gave me a funny look. "Marie, why are you crying?" she asked, and you know the craziest thing, I was. And I couldn't answer her.

Jeffrey Zonder



Contributors' Notes

Janna Adams is a senior history major, but has also studied art and Italian.

Lori Brudner is a junior political science major from Long Island, New York.

Brooke Burling is an about-to-be unemployed senior English major. His Mommy taught him to read.

Laura Carter is a junior English major.

Laura Nien-Hwa Ch'ien is in the middle of producing a sculpture exhibit for children; she is currently constructing bird's nests and other animal homes.

Leigh Edwards is a sophomore English major from Tallahassee, Florida.

Anne Faircloth is a junior English major from North Carolina.

Jeanne M. Favazzo thinks she is a graduating senior, and that's about all she has to say for herself at this point.

Joseph de Gernand is a sophomore graphics arts major from the southernmost part of Alabama.

Laurie Goldman has innate fear of spontaneous combustion.

Ed Goodman is a senior English major and his employed roommate never lets him forget it.

Chris Harrington likes kiwi fruit.

Jonathon Hexner is an English/art double major.

Lucy Hochman says if you don't know her, then get to.

J. D. Humphreys is a sophomore computer science/history/English major from Burke, Virginia. This story is for TJC of Hampton, if she wants it.

Christine Kemper is a sophomore from south-western Virginia.

Dana Wynne Lindquist ('85) is a native North Carolinian who has recently returned to Durham from Chicago. She is the director of development and community relations for a local women's organization.

Mark Mikula is a junior English and psychology major from Toledo, Ohio.

Bryan Morgan is quite happy his mother is not a fish.

John Nilsson is a junior English major from Winston-Salem.

Lisa Oakley is a second-year medical student.

Laura Paresky is an art/art history double major.

Brad Rickman says one, two, three, jiggle-wiggle.

Sally Rosen is a junior from Greensboro, N.C., and she would like to dedicate her work to Julie Ehrhardt.

Nick Sholley graduated in 1989.

Courtney Smith is a sophomore mechanical engineer and a Spanish major.

Anna Jamell Snowdon is a junior art history and design major. She doesn't enjoy eating live goldfish.

Luisa Tio is junior English major from Winston-Salem.

Dean Williamson is a senior English major who's open to any suggestions for the future.

Joanie Wread is a bloated, voracious beached whale who would appreciate someone helping her out of her room.

Jeffrey Zonder is a junior, studying anthropology and art. He lives in sunny Detroit.

Announcements

The Newman Ivey White Award for Literature is being presented for the ninth year to the Duke undergraduates with the outstanding samples of poetry and fiction in *The Archive*. The judges are selected from the Duke community by the management of the Gothic Bookshop. The names of the judges may not be made public. The prize consists of a \$50.00 gift certificate to be used at any of the Duke University Stores. The winners of the Newman Ivey White Award for this issue are Christine Kemper for *The Gatherers* and Anne Faircloth for *The Caretaker*.

Newman Ivey White graduated from Trinity College in 1913 (M.A. 1914) and taught at Trinity College and Duke University from 1919 to 1948, serving as chairman of the Department of English from 1943 to 1948. He edited W.C. Jackson's *An Anthology of Verse by American Negroes* (1924) and *American Negro Folk Songs* (1928). In 1943, he became general editor of the Frank C. Brown Collection of North American Folklore.

White was a noted scholar on Shelley and published many works, among them an anthology *The Best of Shelley* (1932), *The Unextinguised Hearth: Shelley and His Contemporary Critics* (1938), a two-volume biography, *Shelley* (1930), and *Portrait of Shelley* (1945).

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